SPERO MELIORA

Maurice Murray.

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THE WORKS

OF

G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.

REVISED AND CORRECTED BY THE AUTHOR.

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY PREFACE.

> "D'autres auteurs l'ont encore plus avili, (le roman,) en y mêlant les tableaux dégoutant du vice; et tandis que le premier avantage des fictions est de rassembler autour de l'homme tout ce qui, dans la nature, peut lui servir de leçon ou de modèle, on a imaginé qu'on tirerait une utilité quelconque des peintures odieuses de mauvaises mœurs; comme si elles pouvaient jamais laisser le cœur qui les repousse, dans une situation aussi pure que le cœur qui les aurait toujours ignorées. Mais un roman tel qu'on peut le concevoir, tel que nous en avons quelques modèles, est une des plus belles productions de l'esprit humain, une des plus influentes sur la morale des individus, qui doit former ensuite les mœurs publiques."—MADAME DE STAEL. *Essai sur les Fictions.*

> "Poca favilla gran fiamma seconda:
> Forse diretro a me, con miglior voci
> Si pregherà, perchè Cirra risponda."
>
> DANTE. *Paradiso*, Canto I.

VOL. V.

PHILIP AUGUSTUS.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.
LEIPSIG:
BERNH. TAUCHNITZ, JUNR
MDCCCXLV.

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PHILIP AUGUSTUS:

OR,

THE BROTHERS IN ARMS.

BY

G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.

"UNEASY LIES THE HEAD THAT WEARS A CROWN."—HENRY IV.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.
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MDCCCXLV.

ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE FIRST EDITION.

VERY few words of preface are necessary to the following work. In regard to the character of Philip Augustus himself, I have not been guided by any desire of making him appear greater, or better, or wiser, than he really was. Rigord, his physician, William the Breton, his chaplain, who was present at the battle of Bovines, and various other annalists comprised in the excellent collection of memoirs published by Monsieur Guizot, have been my authorities. A different view has been taken of his life by several writers, inimical to him, either from belonging to some of the factions of those times, or to hostile countries; but it is certain, that all who came in close contact with Philip loved the man, and admired the monarch. All the principal events here narrated, in regard to that monarch and his Queen, are historical facts, though brought within a shorter space of time than that which they really occupied. The sketch of King John, and the scenes in which he was unavoidably introduced, I have made as brief as possible, under the apprehension of putting my writings in comparison with something inimitably superior. The picture of the mischievous idiot, Gallon the fool, was taken from a character which fell under my notice for some time in the South of France.

TO

ROBERT SOUTHEY, ESQ., LL.D.

My dear Sir,

Were this book even a great deal better than an author's partiality for his literary offspring can make me believe, I should still have some hesitation in dedicating it to you, if the fact of your allowing me to do so implied anything but your own kindness of heart. I think now, on reading it again, as I thought twelve months ago when I wrote it, that it is the best thing that I have yet composed; but were it a thousand times better in every respect than anything I ever have or ever shall produce, it would still, I am conscious, be very unworthy of your acceptance, and very inferior to what I could wish to offer.

Notwithstanding all your present fame, I am convinced that future years, by adding hourly to the reputation you have already acquired, will justify my feelings towards your works, and that your writings will be amongst the few — the very few — which each age in dying bequeaths to the thousand ages to come.

However, it is with no view of giving a borrowed lustre to my book that I distinguish this page by placing in it your name. Regard, esteem, and admiration, are surely sufficient motives for seeking to offer you some tribute, and sufficient apology, though that tribute be very inferior to the wishes of,

My dear Sir,
Your very faithful Servant,
G. P. R. JAMES.

Maxpoffle, near Melrose, Roxburghshire,
May 25, 1831.

INTRODUCTORY PREFACE.

Few periods in the history of the world present more dazzling scenes in the court and in the field, than that in which flourished Philip Augustus, King of France; and it was very natural, therefore, that a young author, who had read a good deal of French history, should select from it a subject for romance. It may seem strange, however, that in choosing a theme from that period, I neither took the earlier portion of Philip's life, nor that which comprised the most brilliant accessories, but chose a time when the monarch had reached the middle age, and when the most painful reverses of his career befell him.

Besides the peculiar interest which, from very indefinite causes, every one who studies history feels in certain portions thereof, I had several motives for fixing the tale I was about to tell, in the latter part of Philip's reign. In the earlier years of his career, the brilliant qualities and impetuous energies of his great rival, Richard I., of England, outshone his no less powerful, but less sparkling genius; and Philip, though reckoned by his chivalrous contemporaries second to no other monarch on earth, was always looked upon as inferior to Richard. To have brought Richard himself on the scene, though I might have introduced many interesting points of his character, and many incidents in his life which were new to the general public, and untouched by other authors, would have brought my work into very dangerous comparison with the writings of the great master of fictitious narrative, whom I was neither capable of rivalling nor disposed to imitate. Moreover, it seemed to me that the portion of Philip's career which was most likely to engage the sympathies of the public, was his ill-fated, but true and persevering attachment to his beautiful wife, Agnes de Meranie—his struggle with the insolent and powerful Pontiff of Rome, and his masterly conversion of defeat and disgrace in that contest, into the means of subsequent triumph and security. Incidentally, by a slight stretch of the romance-writer's privileges, I thought I could bring into one canvas a number of other points of deep interest; though, to effect that object, I was obliged to violate strict chronological accuracy, and compress within a short period events that were spread over many years of Philip's reign.

With materials long accumulated, and with a sketch of the story—for I can hardly venture to call it a plot—I sat down to write the tale, amidst scenes in the close vicinity of which many of the events had taken place. It is not at all wonderful that the composition was rapid; and now, when—as I have always found the case—public approbation has followed such quick and uninterrupted progress, I am bound to acknowledge that the writing of the whole work, from the first page to the last, did not occupy seven weeks.

I have often inquired in thought why, in every case, those of my works which have been most speedily and, as it would seem, hastily composed, have obtained the greatest share of popularity. Perhaps this may be partly owing tó some faults in the peculiar constitution of my own mind, which may be incapable of retaining in their full vividness the first bright impression of particular conceptions, so that when I write slowly, or am frequently interrupted, the images fade, the interest passes away. But I am inclined to believe that there is something also in the nature of the case, which will always render any prose work of fiction, written rapidly by a man who has a ready command of language, and a full knowledge and strong impression of his subject, more successful than a romance composed very slowly. A writer, though he may be said to paint with his pen, is very differently circumstanced from a painter. He cannot cover his whole canvas at once, coat after coat. He cannot draw back a step or two and see the effect of the whole at every stage. He has not every part before him at the same time. It is an act of memory with him to see all that is in the first volume while he is writing the third. Memory is never so distinct as actual observation; and it is a very great advantage for him to be able to write the conclusion, while the impression of the commencement and course of the narrative—even its minute parts—the feelings, the views, the objects—are vividly present to his mind. If he goes back to read what is done, he is lost; for the energy of personal interest, which is wrought up in a writer more and more at every step, in the persons and events of which he treats, and which should give the greatest fire and vigour to the last portion of his work, soon falls into languor, if he returns to deaden it by a careful perusal of that which to him must be tedious. He has nothing but his rough sketch and his memory to trust to; and the work will always be better, I believe, in many very essential points, if written to its conclusion before any part has faded from remembrance.

It will be clearly understood that I speak merely of prose works of fiction, for in every other sort of composition there are peculiarities which require a different and probably a more elaborate treatment. I can easily understand how Fénélon composed the whole of "Telemachus" in the very short space of time which he is said to have occupied in writing that work; but not how Milton could have produced the "Paradise Lost," without bestowing on it long years of careful labour.

However that may be, I am well aware that there are in "Philip Augustus" many defects which possibly should have prevented it from obtaining the great portion of popularity which it acquired. Those of most importance are in the plan, where two separate stories, the plot and underplot, if they may be so called, are linked together very insufficiently, and in which there is no mystery of sufficient importance to excite the reader's expectation or curiosity—sensations always greatly in an author's favour. The interest of the historical facts—the touching and tender passion of Agnes for her husband—the commanding and powerful character of Philip himself—the passionate earnestness of his attachment for his young wife—the terrible position in which they were both placed, by the domineering interference of the See of Rome, in matters which had been already decided by the clergy of France—afforded, beyond doubt, sufficient materials for framing a much better tale than I have here produced, and account for its popularity, notwithstanding all want of skill on the part of its author.

Various personal motives must always make me feel a deep and even painful interest in the work. The last volume was composed in less than twelve days—days of profound tranquillity, in the midst of beautiful scenes—in happy and convenient retirement, surrounded by all I loved best. But the calmness of those days was of the kind which precedes a storm. The last words of the work had been written but a few minutes—the ink on the paper was hardly dry, when it was my task to receive the last breath of a beloved and revered parent, dying suddenly in the arms of his son. Within ten days after the last French Revolution broke out, and in the midst of the doubts and uncertainties which that event spread through the country, I quitted France, never probably to return.

I have mentioned in the advertisement to the first edition, the historical sources from which the materials for the work were derived. Almost at the moment when the romance called "Philip Augustus" was under my hands, M. Capefigue was writing a sketch of that monarch's life and times. I was not aware of the existence of such a book, and never saw it, till long after my own work was complete; but I have no cause to regret not having met with his "History of Philip Augustus," as he throws no light upon the period that is not afforded by the original sources which were then before me.

PHILIP AUGUSTUS.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

Although there is something chilling in that sad, inevitable word, *the past*—although in looking through the thronged rolls of history, and reading of all the dead passions, the fruitless anxieties, the vain, unproductive yearnings of beings that were once as full of thrilling life and feeling as ourselves, and now are nothing, we gain but the cold moral of our own littleness—still the very indistinctness of the distance softens and beautifies the objects of a former epoch which we thus look back upon; and in the far retrospect of the days gone by, a thousand bright and glistening spots stand out, and catch the last most brilliant rays of a sun that has long set to the multitude of smaller things around them.

To none of these bright points does the light of history lend a more dazzling lustre than to the twelfth century, when the most brilliant (if it was not the most perfect) institution of modern Europe, the feudal system, rose to its highest pitch of splendour; when that institution incorporated with itself the noblest Order that ever the enthusiasm of man (if not his wisdom) conceived—the Order of Chivalry; and when it undertook an enterprise which, though fanatic in design, faulty in execution, and encumbered with all the multitude of frailties that enchain human endeavour, was in itself magnificent and heroic, and in its consequences grand, useful, and impulsive to the whole of Europe,—the Crusades.

The vast expenses, however, which the crusades required—expenses not only of that yellow dross, the unprofitable representative of earth's real riches, but also expenses of invaluable time, of blood, of energy, of talent—exhausted and enfeebled every Christian realm, and left, in each, the nerves of internal policy unstrung and weak, with a lassitude like that which, in the human frame, succeeds to any great and unaccustomed excitement.

Although through all Europe, in that day, the relations of lord, vassal, and serf, were the grand divisions of society, yet it was in France that the feudal system existed in its most perfect form, rising in gradual progression:—first, serfs, or villains; then vavassors, or vassals holding of a vassal; then vassals holding of a suzerain, yet possessing the right of high justice; then suzerains, great feudatories, holding of the king; and lastly, the king himself, with smaller domains than many of his own vassals, but with a general, though limited, right and jurisdiction over them all. In a kingdom so constituted, the crusade, a true feudal enterprise, was, of course, followed with enthusiasm amounting to madness; and the effects were the more dreadful, as the absence of each lord implied, in general, the absence of all effectual government in his domains.

Unnumbered forests then covered the face of France; or, rather, the whole country presented nothing but one great forest; scattered through which, occasional patches of cultivated land, rudely tilled by the serfs of the glebe, sufficed for the support of a thin and diminished population. General police was unthought of; and, though every feudal chief, within his own territory, exercised that sort of justice which to him seemed good, too little distinction existed between the character of robber and judge, for us to suppose that the public benefited much by the tribunals of the barons. The forests, the mountains, and the moors, swarmed with plunderers of every description; and besides the nobles themselves, who very frequently were professed robbers on the highway, three distinct classes of banditti existed in France, who, though different in origin, in manners, and in object, yet agreed wonderfully in the general principle of pillaging all who were unable to protect themselves.

These three classes, the Brabançois, the Cotereaux, and the Routiers, have, from this general assimilating link, been very often confounded; and, indeed, on many occasions, they are found to have changed name and profession when occasion served: the same band having been at one moment Brabançois, and the next Cotereaux, wherever any advantage was to be gained by the difference of denomination; and also we find that they ever acted together as friends and allies, where any general danger threatened their whole community. The Brabançois, however, were originally very distinct from the Cotereaux, having sprung up from the various free companies, which the necessities of the time obliged the monarchs of Europe to employ in their wars. Each vassal, by the feudal tenure, owed his sovereign but a short period of military service, and, if personal interest or regard would sometimes lead them to prolong it, anger or jealousy would as often make them withdraw their aid at the moment it was most needful. Monarchs found that they must have men they could command; and the bands of adventurous soldiers, known by the name of Brabançois,* were always found useful auxiliaries in any time of danger. As long as they were well paid, they were in general brave, orderly, and obedient; the moment their pay ceased, they dispersed under their several leaders, ravaged, pillaged, and consumed, levying on the country in general, that pay which the limited finances of the sovereign always prevented him from continuing, except in time of absolute warfare.† Still, however, even in their character of plunderers, they had the dignity of rank and chivalry, were often led by knights and nobles; and though in the army they joined the qualities of the mercenary and the robber to those of the soldier, in the forest and on the moor they often added somewhat of the frank generosity of the soldier to the rapacity of the freebooter.

The Cotereaux were different in origin—at least, if we may trust Ducange—springing at first from fugitive serfs, and the scattered remains of those various bands of revolted peasantry, which, from time to time, had struggled ineffectually to shake off the oppressive tyranny of their feudal lords.

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* Generally and rationally supposed to have been derived from the country which poured forth the first numerous bands of these adventurers; i. e. Brabant. See Ducange, La Chenaye du Bois, &c. Philip Augustus, in the end, destroyed them for a time.

† The great companies of the fourteenth century had their type in the Brabançois, and various other bodies of freebooters, which appeared previous to that period. The chief characteristic of all these bands was, the having degenerated from soldiers to plunderers, while they maintained a certain degree of discipline and subordination, but cast off every other tie.

These joined together in troops of very uncertain numbers, from tens to thousands, and levied a continual war upon the community they had abandoned, though, probably, they acted upon no general system, nor were influenced by any one universal feeling, but the love of plunder, and the absolute necessity of self-defence.

The Routier was the common robber, who either played his single stake, and hazarded life for life with any one he met, or banded with others, and shared the trade of the Coterel, with whom he was frequently confounded, and from whom, indeed, he hardly differed, except in origin.

While the forests and wilds of France were thus tenanted by men who preyed upon their fellows, the castles and the cities were inhabited by two races, united for the time as lord and serf, but both advancing rapidly to a point of separation: the lord at the very acmé of his power, with no prospect on any side but decline; the burgher struggling already for freedom, and growing strong by association.

Tyrants ever, and often simple robbers, the feudal chieftains had lately received a touch of refinement, by their incorporation with the order of chivalry. Courtesy was joined to valour. Song burst forth, and gave a voice to fame. The lay of the troubadour bore the tidings of great actions from clime to clime, and was at once the knight's ambition and his reward; while the bitter satire of the sirvente, or the playful apologue of the fabliau, scourged all that was base and ungenerous, and held up the disloyal and uncourteous to the all-powerful corrective of public opinion.

Something still remains to be said upon the institution of chivalry, and I can give no better sketch of its history than in the eloquent words of the commentator on St. Palaye.*

"Towards the middle of the tenth century, some poor nobles, united by the necessity of legitimate defence, and startled by the excesses certain to follow the multiplicity of sovereign powers, took pity on the tears and misery of the people. Invoking God and St. George, they gave each other their hand, plighted themselves to the defence of the oppressed, and placed the weak under the protection of their sword. Simple in their dress, austere in their morals, humble after victory, and firm in misfortune, in a short time they won for themselves immense renown.

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* M. Charles Nodier.

"Popular gratitude, in its simple and credulous joy, fed itself with marvellous tales of their deeds of arms, exalted their valour, and united in its prayers its generous liberators with even the powers of Heaven. So natural is it for misfortune to deify those who bring it consolation.

"In those old times, as power was a right, courage was of course a virtue. These men, to whom was given, in the end, the name of Knights, carried this virtue to the highest degree. Cowardice was punished amongst them as an unpardonable crime; falsehood they held in horror; perfidy and breach of promise they branded with infamy; nor have the most celebrated legislators of antiquity anything comparable to their statutes.

"This league of warriors maintained itself for more than a century in all its pristine simplicity, because the circumstances amidst which it rose changed but slowly; but when a great political and religious movement announced the revolution about to take place in the minds of men, then chivalry took a legal form, and a rank amidst authorised institutions.

"The crusades, and the emancipation of the cities which marked the apogee of the feudal government, are the two events which most contributed to the destruction of chivalry. True it is, that then also it found its greatest splendour; but it lost its virtuous independence and its simplicity of manners.

"Kings soon found all the benefit they might derive from an armed association which should hold a middle place between the crown and those too powerful vassals who usurped all its prerogatives. From that time, kings created knights, and bound them to the throne by all the forms used in feudal investiture. But the particular character of those distant times was the pride of privileges; and the crown could not devise any, without the nobility arrogating to itself the same. Thus the possessors of the greater feofs hastened to imitate their monarch. Not only did they create knights, but this title, dear in a nation's gratitude, became their hereditary privilege.* This invasion stopped not there;

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* This is very doubtful in a strict sense, though, undoubtedly, many of the high feudatories received knighthood at the font.

lesser chiefs imitated their sovereigns, and chivalry, losing its ancient unity, became no more than an honourable distinction, the principles of which, however, had for long a happy influence upon the fate of the people."

Such, then, was the position of France towards the end of the twelfth century. A monarch, with limited revenues and curtailed privileges; a multitude of petty sovereigns, each despotic in his own territories; a chivalrous and ardent nobility; a population of serfs, just learning to dream of liberty; a soil rich, but overgrown with forests, and almost abandoned to itself; an immense body of the inhabitants living by rapine, and a total want of police and of civil government.

The crusade against Saladin was over.—Richard Cœur de Lion was dead, and Constantinople had just fallen into the hands of a body of French knights at the time this tale begins. At the same period, John Lackland held the sceptre of the English kings with a feeble hand, and a poor and dastardly spirit; while Philip Augustus, with grand views and an unscrupulous conscience, but a limited power, sat firmly on the throne of France; and by the vigorous impulse of a great, though a passionate and irregular mind, hurried forward his kingdom, and Europe along with it, towards days of greatness and civilization, still remote.

CHAPTER II.

Seven hundred years ago, the same bright summer sun was shining in his glory, that now rolls past before my eyes in all the beneficent majesty of light. It was the month of May; and everything in nature seemed to breathe of the fresh buoyancy of youth. There was a light breeze in the sky, which carried many a swift shadow over mountain, plain, and wood. There was a springy vigour in the atmosphere, as if the wind itself were young. The earth was full of flowers, and the woods full of voice; and song and perfume shared the air between them.

Such was the morning when a party of travellers took their way slowly up the south-eastern side of the famous Monts d'Or, in Auvergne. The road, winding in and out through the immense forest which covered the base of the hills, now showed, now concealed, the abrupt mountain-peaks starting out from their thick vesture of wood, and opposing their cold blue summits to the full blaze of the morning sun. Sometimes, turning round a sharp angle of the rock, the trees would break away and leave the eye full room to roam—past the forest, hanging thick upon the edge of the slope—over valleys and hills, and plains beyond—to the far wanderings of the Allier through the distant country. Nor did the view end here; for the plains themselves, lying like a map spread out below, stretched away to the very sky: and even there, a few faint blue shadows, piled up in the form of peaks and cones, left the mind uncertain whether the Alps themselves did not there bound the view, or whether some fantastic clouds did not combine with that bright deceiver, fancy, to cheat the eye.

At other times, the road seemed to plunge into the deepest recesses of the mountains, passing through the midst of black detached rocks and tall columns of grey basalt—broken fragments of which lay scattered on either side—while a thousand shrubs and flowers twined, as in mockery, over them, and the protruding roots of the large ancient trees grasped the fallen prisms of the volcanic pillars, as if vaunting the pride of even vegetable life over the cold, dull, inanimate stone.

Here and there, too, would often rise up, on each side, high masses of the mountain, casting all into shadow between them; while the bright yellow lights which streamed amidst the trees above, spangling the foliage as with liquid gold, and the shining of the clear blue sky over-head, were the only signs of summer that reached the bottom of the ravine. Then again, breaking out upon a wide green slope, the path would emerge into the sunshine, or, passing even through the very dew of the cataract, would partake of the thousand colours of the sunbow that hung above the fall.

It was a scene and a morning like one of those days of unmixed happiness that sometimes shine in upon the path of youth—so few, and yet so beautiful. Its very wildness was lovely; and the party of travellers who wound up the path added to the interest of the scene by redeeming it from perfect solitude, and linking it to social existence.

The manner of their advance, too, which partook of the forms of a military march, made the group in itself picturesque. A single squire, mounted on a strong bony horse, led the way at about fifty yards' distance from the rest of the party. He was a tall, powerful man, of a dark complexion and high features; and from beneath his thick, arched eyebrow gazed out a full, brilliant, black eye, which roved incessantly over the scene, and seemed to notice the smallest object around. He was armed with cuirass and steel cap, sword and dagger; and yet the different form and rude finishing of his arms did not admit of their being confounded with those of a knight. The two who next followed were evidently of a different grade: and though both young men, both wore a large cross pendant from their neck, and a small branch of palm in the bonnet. The one who rode on the right hand was equipped at all points, except his head and arms, with armour, curiously inlaid in many places with gold, in a thousand elegant and fanciful arabesques, the art of perfecting which is said to have been first discovered at Damascus.* The want of his gauntlets and brassards showed his arms covered with a quilted jacket of crimson silk, called a gambesoon, and large gloves of thick buff leather. The place of his casque was supplied by a large brown hood, cut into a long peak behind, which fell almost to his horse's back; while the folds in front were drawn round a face which, without being strikingly handsome, was nevertheless noble and dignified in its expression, though clouded by a shade of melancholy which had channelled his cheek with many a deep line, and drawn his brow into a fixed but not a bitter frown.

In form he was, to all appearance, broad made and powerful; but the steel in which he was clothed, of course greatly concealed the exact proportions of his figure; though withal there was a sort of easy grace in his carriage, which, almost approaching to negligence, was but the more conspicuous from the very stiffness of his armour. His features were aquiline, and had something in them that seemed to betoken quick and violent passions; and yet such a supposition was contradicted by the calm, still, melancholy of his large dark eyes.

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* The account given of the armour of the Count d'Auvergne in this place, has been somewhat severely criticised; but the precise period of the introduction of plates into the harness of knights, in various parts of Europe, is very obscure. We know, that early in the reign of John, plates were used for the defence of the elbows; we know, that in the reign of his son, steel greaves were worn; and from the words of William the Breton, in describing the battle of Bovines, there can be no doubt that a complete cuirass of steel was sometimes adopted—perhaps with the hauberk. Indeed it is my belief, that the use of the real *lorica* was never entirely abandoned in favour of the hauberk.

The horse on which the knight rode was a tall, powerful German stallion, jet black in colour; and though not near so strong as one which a squire led at a little distance behind, yet, being unencumbered with panoply itself, it was fully equal to the weight of its rider, armed as he was.

The crusader's companion—for the palm and cross betokened that they had both returned from the Holy Land—formed as strong a contrast as can well be conceived to the horseman we have just described. He was a fair, handsome man, round whose broad, high forehead curled a profusion of rich chestnut hair, which behind, having been suffered to grow to an extraordinary length, fell down in thick masses upon his shoulders. His eye was one of those long, full, grey eyes, which, when fringed with very dark lashes, give a more thoughtful expression to the countenance than even those of a deeper hue; and such would have been the case with his, had not its clear powerful glance been continually at variance with a light, playful turn of his lip, which seemed full of sportive mockery.

His age might be four or five and twenty—perhaps more; for he was of that complexion which retains long the look of youth, and on which even cares and toils seem for years to spend themselves in vain:—and yet it was evident, from the bronzed ruddiness of what was originally a very fair complexion, that he had suffered long exposure to a burning sun; while a deep scar on one of his cheeks, though it did not disfigure him, told that he did not spare his person in the battle-field.

No age or land is, of course, without its foppery; and however inconsistent such a thing may appear, joined with the ideas of cold steel and mortal conflicts, no small touch of it was visible in the apparel of the younger horseman. His person, from the shoulders down to the middle of his thigh, was covered with a bright hauberk, or shirt of steel rings, which, polished like glass, and lying flat upon each other, glittered and flashed in the sunshine as if they were formed of diamonds. On his head he wore a green velvet cap, which corresponded in colour with the border of his gambesoon, the puckered silk of which rose above the edge of the shirt of mail, and prevented the rings from chafing upon his neck. Over this hung a long mantle of fine cloth of a deep green hue, on the shoulder of which was embroidered a broad red cross, distinguishing the French crusader. The hood, which was long and pointed, like his companion's, was thrown back from his face, and exposed a lining of miniver.

The horse he rode was a slight, beautiful Arabian, as white as snow in every part of his body, except where, round his nostrils, and on the tendons of his pastern and hoof, the white mellowed into a fine pale pink. To look at his slender limbs, and the bending pliancy of every step, one would have judged him scarcely able to bear so tall and powerful a man as his rider, loaded with a covering of steel; but the proud toss of his head, the snort of his wide nostril, and the flashing fire of his clear crystal eye, spoke worlds of unexhausted strength and spirit; though the thick dust, with which the whole party were covered, evinced that their day's journey had already been long. Behind each knight, except where the narrowness of the road obliged them to change the order of their march, one of their squires led a battle-horse in his right hand; and several others followed, bearing the various pieces of their offensive and defensive armour.

It was, however, to be remarked, that the arms of the first-mentioned horseman were distributed amongst a great many persons; one carrying the casque upright on the pommel of the saddle, another bearing his shield and lance, another his gauntlets; while the servants of the second knight, more scanty in number, were fain to take each upon himself a heavier load.

To these immediate attendants succeeded a party of simple grooms leading various other horses, amongst which were one or two Arabians, and the whole cavalcade was terminated by a small body of archers.

For a long way, the two knights proceeded silently on their course, sometimes side by side, sometimes one preceding the other, as the road widened or diminished in its long tortuous ascent of the mountains, but still without exchanging a single word. The one whom — though there was probably little difference of age — we shall call the elder, seemed, indeed, too deeply absorbed in his own thoughts, to desire, or even permit of conversation, and kept his eyes bent pensively forward on the road before, without even giving a glance to his companion, whose gaze roamed enchanted over all the exquisite scenery around, and whose mind seemed fully occupied in noting all the lovely objects he beheld. From time to time, indeed, his eye glanced to his brother knight, and a sort of sympathetic shade came over his brow, as he saw the deep gloom in which he was involved. Occasionally, too, a sort of movement of impatience appeared to agitate him, as if there was something in his mind that he fain would speak. But then again the cold unexpecting fixedness of his companion's features seemed to repel it, and, returning to the view, he more than once apparently suppressed what was rising to his lips, or only gave it vent in humming a few lines of some lay, or some sirvente, the words of which, however, were inaudible. At length what was labouring within broke through all restraint, and, drawing his rein, he made his horse pause for an instant, while he exclaimed—

"Is it possible, Beau Sire d'Auvergne, that the sight of your own fair land cannot draw from you a word or a glance?" while as he spoke, he made his horse bound forward again, and throwing his left hand over the whole splendid scene that the opening of the trees exposed to the sight, he seemed to bid it appeal to the heart of his companion, and upbraid him with his indifference.

The Count d'Auvergne raised his eyes, and let them rest for an instant on the view to which his companion pointed; then dropped them to his friend's face, and replied calmly—

"Had any one told me, five years ago, that such would be the case, Guy de Coucy, I would have given him the lie."

Guy de Coucy answered nothing directly, but took up his song again, saying—

"He who tells his sorrow, may find
That he sows but the seed of the empty wind;
But he who keeps it within his breast,
Nurses a serpent to gnaw his rest."

"You sing truly, De Coucy, as I have proved too bitterly," replied the Count d'Auvergne; "but since we have kept companionship together, I have ever found you gay and happy. Why should I trouble your repose with sorrows not your own?"

"Good faith! fair count, I understand you well," replied the other, laughing. "You would say that you have ever held me more merry than wise; more fit to enliven a dull table than listen to a sad tale; a better companion in brawls or merry-making than in sorrows or solemnities; and 'faith you are right, I love them not; and, therefore, is it not the greatest proof of my friendship, when, hating sorrows as much as man well may, I ask you to impart me yours?"

"In truth, it is," answered the Count d'Auvergne; "but yet I will not load your friendship so, De Coucy. Mine are heavy sorrows, which I would put upon no man's light heart. However, I have this day given way to them more than I should do; but it is the very sight of my native land, beautiful and beloved as it is, which, waking in my breast the memory of hopes and joys passed away for ever, has made me less master of myself than I am wont."

"Fie now, fie!" cried his friend; "Thibalt d'Auvergne, wouldst thou make me think the heart of a bold knight as fragile as the egg of a chaffinch, on which if but a cat sets her paw, it is broken never to be mended again? Nay, nay! there is consolation even in the heart of all evils; like the honey that the good knight, Sir Sampson, found in the jaws of the lion which he killed when he was out hunting with the king of the Saracens."

"You mean, when he was going down to the Philistines," said his friend with a slight smile; though such mistakes were no way rare in those days; and De Coucy spoke it in somewhat of a jesting tone, as if laughing himself at the ignorance he assumed.

"Be it so, be it so!" proceeded the other. "'Tis all the same. But, as I said, there is consolation in every evil. Hast thou lost thy dearest friend in the battle field? Thank God! that he died knightly in his harness! Hast thou pawned thy estate to the Jew? Thank God! that thou mayst curse him to thy heart's content in this world, and feel sure of his damnation hereafter!" The Count smiled; and his friend proceeded, glad to see that he had won him even for a time from himself: —"Has thy falcon strayed? Say, 'twas a vile bird and a foul feeder, and call it a good loss. Has thy lady proved cold? Has thy mistress betrayed thee? Seek a warmer or a truer, and be happily deceived again."

The colour came and went in the cheek of the Count d'Auvergne; and for an instant his eyes flashed fire; but reading perfect unconsciousness of all offence in the clear open countenance of De Coucy, he bit his lip till his teeth left a deep white dent therein, but remained silent.

"Fie, fie! D'Auvergne!" continued De Coucy, not noticing the emotion his words had produced. "Thou, a knight who hast laid more Saracen heads low than there are bells on your horse's poitral, not able to unhorse so black a miscreant as Melancholy! Thou, who hast knelt at the holy sepulchre," he added in a more dignified tone, "not to find hope in faith, and comfort in the blessed Saviour, for whose cause you have fought!"

The Count turned round, in some surprise at the unwonted vein which the last part of his companion's speech indicated; but De Coucy kept to it but for a moment, and then, darting off, he proceeded in the same light way with which he had begun the conversation. "Melancholy!" he cried, in a loud voice, at the same time taking off his glove, as if he would have cast it down as a gage of battle—"Melancholy and all that do abet him, Love, Jealousy, Hatred, Fear, Poverty, and the like, I do pronounce ye false miscreants, and defy you all! There lays my glove!" and he made a show of throwing it on the ground.

"Ah, De Coucy!" said D'Auvergne, with a melancholy smile, "your light heart never knew what love is; and may it never know!"

"By the rood! you do me wrong," cried De Coucy—"bitter wrong, D'Auvergne! I defy you, in the whole lists of Europe's chivalry, to find a man who has been so often in love as I have — ay, and though you smile — with all the signs of true and profound love to boot. When I was in love with the Princess of Suabia, did not I sigh three times every morning, and sometimes sneeze as often? for it was winter weather, and I used to pass half my nights under her window. When I was in love with the daughter of Tancred of Sicily, did I not run seven courses for her with all the best champions of England and France, in my silk gambesoon, with no arms but my lance in my hand, and my buckler on my arm? When I was in love with the pretty Marchioness of Syracuse, did not I ride a mare one whole day,* without ever knowing it, from pure absence of mind and profound love? — and when I was in love with all the ladies of Cyprus, did not I sing lays and write sirventes for them all?"

"Your fighting in your hoqueton," replied D'Auvergne,

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* To ride a mare was reckoned in those days unworthy of any one but a juggler, a charlatan, or a serf.

"showed that you were utterly fearless; and your riding on a mare showed that you were utterly whimsical; but neither one nor the other showed you were in love, my dear De Coucy. But look, De Coucy! the road bends downwards into that valley. Either I have strangely forgotten my native land, or your surly squire has led us wrong, and we are turning away from the Puy to the valleys of Dome.—Ho, sirrah!" he continued, elevating his voice and addressing the squire, who rode first, "are you sure you are right?"

"Neither Cotereaux, nor Brabançois, nor Routiers, nor living creatures of any kind, see I, to the right or left, Beau Sire," replied the squire in a measured man-at-arms-like tone, without either turning his head or slackening his pace in the least degree.

"But art thou leading us on the right road? I ask thee!" repeated the Count.

"I know not, Beau Sire," replied the squire. "I was thrown out to guard against danger,—I had no commands to seek the right road." And he continued to ride on in the wrong way as calmly as if no question existed in respect to its direction.

"Halt!" cried De Coucy. The man-at-arms stood still; and a short council was held between the two knights in regard to their farther proceedings, when it was determined that, although they were evidently wrong, they should still continue for a time on the same road, rather than turn back after so long a journey. "We must come to some château or some habitation soon," said De Coucy; "or, at the worst, find some of your country shepherds to guide us on towards the chapel. But, methinks, Hugo de Barre, you might have told us sooner, that you did not know the way!"

"Now, good sir knight," replied the squire, speaking more freely when addressed by his own lord, "none knew better than yourself, that I had never been in Auvergne in all my days before. Did you ever hear of my quitting my cot and my glebe, except to follow my good lord the baron, your late father, for a forty days' *chevauchée* against the enemy, before I took the blessed cross, and went a fool's errand to the Holy Land?"

"How now, sir!" cried De Coucy. "Do you call the holy crusade a fool's errand? Be silent, Hugo, and lead on. Thou art a good scout and a good soldier, and that is all thou art fit for."

The squire replied nothing; but rode on in silence, instantly resuming his habit of glancing his eye rapidly over every object that surrounded him, with a scrupulous accuracy that left scarce a possibility of ambuscade. The knights and their train followed; and turning round a projecting part of the mountain, they found that the road, instead of descending, as they had imagined, continued to climb the steep, which at every step gained some new feature of grandeur and singularity, till the sublime became almost the terrific. The verdure gradually ceased, and the rocks approached so close on each side as to leave no more space than just sufficient for the road and a narrow deep ravine by its side, at the bottom of which, wherever the thick bushes permitted the eye to reach it, the mountain torrent was seen dashing and roaring over enormous blocks of black lava, which it had channelled into all strange shapes and appearances. High above the heads of the travellers, also, rose on either hand a range of enormous basaltic columns, fringed at the top by some dark old pines which, hanging seventy or eighty feet in the air, seemed to form a frieze to the gigantic colonnade through which they passed.

De Coucy looked up with a smile, not unmixed with awe. "Could you not fancy, D'Auvergne," he said, "that we were entering the portico of a temple built by some bad enchanter to the Evil Spirit? By the holy rood! it is a grand and awful scene! I did not think thy Auvergne was so magnificent."

As he spoke, the squire, who preceded them, suddenly stopped, and turning round—

"The road ends here, Beau Sire," he cried. "The bridge is broken, and there is no farther passage."

"Light of my eyes!" cried De Coucy; "this is unfortunate! But let us see, at all events, before we turn back:" and, riding forward, he approached the spot where his squire stood.

It was even as the man had said, however. All farther progress in a direct line was stopped by an immense mass of lava, which had probably lain there for immemorial centuries. Certainly, when the road was made, which was probably in the days of the Romans, the same obstruction had existed; for, instead of attempting to continue the way along the side of the hill any farther in that direction, the constructors had thrown a single arch over the narrow ravine, and the road was carried on through a wide breach in the rocks on the other side. This opening, however, offered nothing to the eye of De Coucy and his companions but a vacant space, backed by the clear blue sky. The travellers paused, and gazed upon the broken bridge and the path beyond for a minute or two, before turning back, with that sort of silent pause which generally precedes the act of yielding to some disagreeable necessity. However, after a moment, the younger knight beckoned to one of his squires, crying—"Give me my casque and sword!"

"Now, in the name of Heaven! what Rolando trick are you going to put in practice, De Coucy?" cried the Count d'Auvergne, watching his companion take his helmet from the squire, and buckle on his long straight sword by his side. "Are you going to cleave that rock of lava, or bridge over the ravine, with your shield?"

"Neither," replied the knight, with a smile; "but I hear voices, brought by the wind through that cleft on the other side, and I am going over to ask the way."

"De Coucy, you are mad!" cried the Count. "Your courage is insanity. Neither man nor horse can take that leap!"

"Pshaw! you know not what Zerbilin can do!" said De Coucy, calmly patting the arching neck of his slight Arabian horse; and yet you have yourself seen him take greater leaps than that!"

"But see you not the road slopes upwards?" urged the Count. "There is no hold for his feet. The horse is weary."

"Weary!" exclaimed De Coucy: "nonsense! Give me space —give me space!"

And, in spite of all remonstrance, he reined his horse back, and then spurred him on to the leap. The obedient animal galloped onward to the brink, shot forward like an arrow, and reached the other side.* But what the Count d'Auvergne had said was just. The road beyond sloped upwards from the very edge, and was composed of loose volcanic scoria, which afforded no firm footing; so that the horse, though he accomplished the leap, slipped backwards the moment he had reached the opposite side, and rolled with his rider down into the ravine below!

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* Although this act of rashness certainly breathes the spirit of romance, yet such things have been done, and even in our own day.

"Jesu Maria!" cried the Count, springing to the ground, and advancing to the edge of the ravine. "De Coucy, De Coucy!" cried he, "are you in life?"

"Yes, yes!" answered a faint voice from below: "and Zerbilin is not hurt!"

"But yourself, De Coucy!" cried his friend,—"speak of yourself!"

A groan was the only reply.

CHAPTER III.

It was in vain that the Count d'Auvergne gazed down into the ravine, endeavouring to gain a sight of his rash friend. A mass of shrubs overhung the shelving edge of the rock, and totally intercepted his view. In the meanwhile, however, Hugo de Barre had sprung to the ground, and was already half-way over the brink, attempting to descend to his lord's assistance, when a deep voice from the bottom of the dell exclaimed, "Hold! hold above! Try not to come down there. You will bring the rocks and loose stones upon our heads, and kill us all."

"Who is it speaks?" cried the Count d'Auvergne.

"One of the hermits of Our Lady's chapel of the Mont d'Or," replied the voice. "If ye be this knight's friends, go back for a thousand paces, and ye will find a path down to the left, which leads to the road by the stream. But if ye be his enemies, who have driven him to the dreadful leap he has taken, get ye hence, for he is even now at the foot of the cross."

The Count d'Auvergne, without staying to reply, rode back as the hermit directed, and easily found the path, which they had before passed, but which, as it apparently led in a direction different from that in which they wished to proceed, they had hardly noticed at the time. Following this, they soon reached the bottom of the ravine, where they found a good road, jammed in, as it were, between the rocks over which they had travelled and the small mountain-stream they had observed from above. For some way the windings of the dell, and the various projections of the crags, prevented them from seeing to any great distance in advance; but at length they came suddenly upon a group of several persons, mounted and dismounted, both male and female, gathered round De Coucy's beautiful Arabian, Zerbilin, who stood in the midst, soiled and scratched indeed, and trembling with the fright and struggle of his fall, but otherwise uninjured, and filling the air with his long wild neighings. The group by which he was surrounded consisted entirely of the attendants of some persons not present, squires and varlets in very gay attire; and female servants and waiting women, not a bit behind hand in flutter and finery. A beautiful brown Spanish jennet, such as any fair dame might love to ride, stood near, held by one of those old squires who, in that age, cruelly monopolised the privilege of assisting their lady to mount and dismount, much to the disappointment of many a young page and gallant gentleman, who would willingly have relieved them of the task, especially when the lady in question was young and fair. Not far off was placed a strong but ancient horse, waiting for some other person, who was absent with the lady of the jennet.

Above the heads of this group, half-way up the face of the rock, stood a large cross elevated on a projecting mass of stone; and behind it appeared the mouth of a cavern, or rather excavation, from which the blocks of lava had been drawn, in order to form the bridge we have mentioned, now fallen from its "high estate," and encumbering the bed of the river. It was easy, from below, to perceive the figures of several persons moving to and fro in the cave, and concluding at once that it was thither his unfortunate friend had been borne, the Count d'Auvergne sprang to the ground, and passing through the group of pages and waiting-women, who gazed upon him and his archers with some alarm, he made his way up the little path that led to the mouth of the cavern. Here he found De Coucy stretched upon a bed of dry rushes, while a tall, emaciated old man, covered with a brown frock, and ornamented with a long white beard, stood by his side, holding his hand. Between his fingers the hermit held a lancet; and from the strong muscular arm of the knight, a stream of blood was just beginning to flow into a small wooden bowl held by a page.

Several other persons, however, filled the hermit's cave, of whom two are worthy of more particular notice. The first was a short, stout, old man, with a complexion that argued florid health and vigour, and a small, keen, grey eye, the quick movement of which, as well as a sudden curl of the lip and contraction of the brow on every slight occasion of contradiction, might well bespeak a quick and impatient disposition. The second was a young lady of perhaps nineteen or twenty, slight in figure, but yet with every limb rounded in the full and swelling contour of woman's most lovely age. Her features were small, delicate, and nowhere sharp, yet cut with that square exactness of outline so beautiful in the efforts of Grecian art. Her eyes were long, and full, and dark; and the black lashes that fringed them, as she gazed earnestly on the figure of De Coucy, swept downward and lay upon her cheek. The hair, that fell in a profusion of thick curls round her face, was as black as jet; and yet her skin, though of that peculiar tint almost inseparable from dark hair and eyes, was strikingly fair, and as smooth as alabaster; while a faint but very beautiful colour spread over each cheek, and died away into the clear white of her temples.

In days when love was a duty, and coldness a dishonour, on the part of all who enjoyed or aspired to chivalry, no false delicacies, no fear of compromising herself, none of the mighty considerations of small proprieties that now-a-days hamper all the feelings, and enchain all the frankness, of the female heart, weighed on the lady of the thirteenth century. It was her duty to feel and to express an interest in every good knight in danger and misfortune; and the fair being we have just described, before the eyes of her father, who looked upon her with honourable pride, knelt by the side of De Coucy; and while the hermit held the arm from which the blood was just beginning to flow, she kept the small fingers of her soft white hand upon the other sinewy wrist of the insensible knight, and anxiously watched the returning animation.

While the Count d'Auvergne entered the cave in silence, and placed himself beside the hermit, De Coucy's squire, Hugo de Barre, with one of the pages, both devotedly attached to their young lord, had climbed up also, and stood at the mouth of the cavern.

"God's life! Hugo,"* cried the page, "let them not take my lord's blood. We have got amongst traitors. They are killing him!"

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* I must apologize to the reader, once for all, for such expressions as the above, merely assuring him that, were they not admitted here, the book would afford no true picture of the times to which it refers.

"Peace, fool!" answered Hugo; "'tis a part of leech-craft. Did you never see Fulk, the barber, bleed the old baron? Why, he had it done every week. The De Coucys have more blood than other men."

The page was silent for a moment, and then replied in an under-tone, for there was a sort of contagious stillness round the hurt knight—"You had better look to it, Hugo. They are bleeding my lord too much. That hermit means him harm. See, how he stares at the great carbuncle in Sir Guy's thumb-ring! He's murdering my lord to steal it.—Shall I put my dagger in him?"

"Hold thy silly prate, Ermold de Marcy!" replied the squire; "think you, the good Count would stand by and see his sworn brother in arms bled, without it was for his good? See you now, Sir Guy wakes!—God's benison on you, Sir Hermit!"

De Coucy did indeed open his eyes, and looked round, though but faintly. "D'Auvergne," said he, the moment after, while the playful smile fluttered again round his lips, "by the rood! I had nearly leaped farther than I intended, and taken Zerbilin with me into Paradise. Thanks, hermit!—thanks, gentle lady!—I can rise now. Ho! Hugo, lend me thine arm."

But the hermit gently put his hand upon the knight's breast, saying, in a tone more resembling cynical bitterness than Christian mildness, "Hold, my son! This world is not the sweetest of dwelling places; but if thou wouldst not change it for a small, cold, comfortable grave, lie still. You shall be carried up to the chapel of Our Lady, by the lake, where there is more space than in this cave; and there I will find means to heal your bruises in two days, if your quick spirit may be quiet for so long."

As he spoke, he stopped the bleeding, and bound up the arm of the knight, who finding, probably, even by the slight exertion he had made, that he was in no fit state to act for himself, submitted quietly, merely giving a glance to the Count d'Auvergne, half rueful, half smiling, as if he would fain have laughed at himself and his own helplessness, if the pain of his bruises would have let him.

"I prithee, holy father hermit, tell me," said the Count d'Auvergne, "is the hurt of this good knight dangerous? for if it be, we will send to Mont Ferrand for some skilful leech from my uncle's castle—and instantly."

"His body is sufficiently bruised, my son," replied the hermit, "to give him, I hope, a sounder mind for the future, than to leap his horse down a precipice: and as for the leech, let him stay at Mont Ferrand. The knight is bad enough without his help, if he come to make him worse; and if he come to cure him, I can do that without his aid. Leech-craft is as much worse than ignorance, as killing is worse than letting die."

"By my faith and my knighthood," cried the old gentleman, who stood at De Coucy's feet, and who, during the Count's question and the hermit's somewhat ungracious reply, had been gazing at d'Auvergne with various looks of recognition—"by my faith and my knighthood! I believe it is the Count Thibalt—though my eyes are none of the clearest, and it is long since—but, yes! it is surely—Count Thibalt d'Auvergne?"

"The same, Beau Sire," replied D'Auvergne; "my memory is less true than yours, or I see my father's old arms' fellow, Count Julian of the Mount?"

"E'en so, fair sir!—e'en so!" replied the old man: "I and my daughter Isadore are even now upon our way to Vic le Comte, to pass some short space with the good Count, your father. A long and weary journey have we had hither, all the way from Flanders; and, for our safe arrival, we go to offer at the chapel of Our Lady of St. Pavin of the Mount d'Or, ere we proceed to taste your castle's hospitality. Good faith! you may well judge 'tis matter of deep import brings me so far. Affairs of policy, young sir—affairs of policy!" he added, in a low and consequential voice. "Doubtless your father may have hinted—"

"For five long years, fair sir, I have not seen my father's face," replied D'Auvergne. "By the cross I bear, you may see where I have sojourned; and De Coucy and myself were but now going to lay our palms upon the altar of Our Lady of St. Pavin (according to a holy vow we made at Rome), prior to turning our steps towards our castle also. Let us all on together, then—I see the holy hermit has commanded the varlets to make a litter for my hurt friend; and after having paid our vows, we will back to Vic le Comte, and honour your arrival with wine and music."

While this conversation passed between D'Auvergne and the old knight, De Coucy's eyes had sought out more particularly the fair girl who had been kneeling by his side; and he addressed to her much and manifold thanks for her gentle tending —in so low a tone, however, that it obliged her to stoop over him in order to hear what he said. De Coucy, as he had before professed to the Count d'Auvergne, had often tasted love, such as it was, and had ever been a bold wooer; but in the present instance, though he felt very sure and intimately convinced, that the eyes which now looked upon him were brighter than ever he had seen, and the lips that spoke to him were fuller, and softer, and sweeter, than ever had moved in his eyesight before, yet his stock of gallant speeches failed him strangely, and he found some difficulty even in thanking the lady as he could have wished. At all events, so lame he thought the expression of those thanks, that he endeavoured to make up for the deficiency by reiteration —and repeated them so often, that at length the lady gently imposed silence upon him, lest his much speaking might retard his cure.

The secrets of a lady's breast are a sort of forbidden fruit, which we shall not be bold enough to touch; and therefore, whatever the fair Isadore might think of De Coucy—whatever touch of tenderness might mingle with her pity—whatever noble and knightly qualities she might see, or fancy, on his broad, clear brow, and bland, full lip—we shall not even stretch our hand towards the tree of knowledge, far less offer the fruit thereof to any one else. Overt acts, however, of all kinds, are common property; and therefore it is no violation of confidence, or of any thing else, to say that something in the tone and manner of the young knight made the soft crimson grow a shade deeper in the cheek of Isadore of the Mount; and, when the litter was prepared, and De Coucy placed thereon, though she proceeded with every appearance of indifference to mount her light jennet, and follow the cavalcade, she twice turned, to give a quick and anxious look towards the vehicle that contained him, as it was borne down the narrow and slippery path from the cave.

Although nothing but that which passed between De Coucy and the lady has been particularly mentioned here, it is not to be thence inferred that all the other personages who were present stood idly looking on—that the Count d'Auvergne took no heed of his hurt friend—that Sir Julian of the Mount forgot his daughter—or that the attendants of the young knight were unmindful of their master. Some busied themselves in preparing the litter of boughs and bucklers—some spread cloaks and furred aumuces upon it to make it soft—and some took care that the hauberk, head-piece, and sword, of which De Coucy had been divested, should not be left behind in the cave.

In the mean while, Sir Julian of the Mount, while still in the cave, pointed out his daughter to the Count Thibalt d'Auvergne, boasted her skill in leech-craft, and her many other estimable qualities, and assured him that he might safely intrust the care of De Coucy's recovery to her.

The Count d'Auvergne's eye fell coldly upon her, and ran over every exquisite line of loveliness, as she stood by the young knight, unconscious of his gaze, without evincing one spark of that gallant enthusiasm which the sight of beauty generally called up in the chivalrous bosoms of the thirteenth century. It was a cold, steady, melancholy look—and yet it ended with a sigh. The only compliment he could force his lips to form, went to express that his friend was happy in having fallen into such fair and skilful hands; and, this said, he proceeded to the side of the litter, which, borne by six of the attendants, was now carried down to the bank of the stream, and thence along the road that, winding onward through the narrow gorge, passed under the broken bridge, and gradually climbed to the higher parts of the mountain.

The general cavalcade followed as they might; for the scantiness of the path, which grew smaller and smaller as it proceeded, prevented the possibility of any regularity in their march. At length, however, the gorge widened out into a basin of about five hundred yards in diameter, round which the hills sloped up on every side, taking the shape of a funnel. Over one edge thereof poured a small but beautiful cascade, starting from mass to mass of volcanic rock, whose decomposition offered a thousand bright and singular hues, amidst which the white and flashing waters of the stream agitated themselves with a strange, but picturesque effect.

At the bottom of the cascade was a group of shepherds' huts; and as it was impossible for the horses to proceed further, it was determined to leave the principal part of the attendants also there, to wait the return of the party from the chapel, which was, of course, to take place as soon as De Coucy had recovered from his bruises.

Some difficulty occurred in carrying the litter over the steeper part of the mountain, but at length it was accomplished; and, skirting round part of a large ancient forest, the pilgrims came suddenly on the banks of that most beautiful and extraordinary effort of nature, the *Lac Pavin.* Beneath their eyes extended a vast sheet of water, the crystal pureness of which mocks all description, enclosed within a basin of verdure, whose sides, nearly a hundred and fifty feet in height, rise from the banks of the lake to the flatter ground above, with so precipitous an elevation, that no footing, however firm, can there keep its hold. For the space of a league and a half, which the lake occupies, this beautiful green border, with very little variation in its height, may still be seen following the limpid line of the water, into which it dips itself, clear, and at once, without rush or ooze, or water plant of any description, to break the union of the soft turf and the pure wave.

Towards the south and east, however, extends, even now, an immense mass of dark and sombre wood, which, skirting down the precipitous bank, appears to contemplate its own majesty in the mirror of the lake. At the same time, all around, rise up a giant family of mountain peaks, which, each standing out, abrupt and single, in the sunny air, seem frowning on the traveller who invades their solitude.

Here, in the days of Philip Augustus, stood a small chapel, dedicated to the Virgin, called Our Lady of St. Pavin; and many a miraculous cure is said to have been operated by the holy relics of the shrine, which caused Our Lady of St. Pavin to be the favourite saint of many of the chief families in France. By the side of the chapel was placed a congregation of small huts or cells, both for the accommodation of the various pilgrims who came to visit the shrine, and for the dwelling of three holy hermits, one of whom served the altar as a priest, while the other two retained the less distinct character of *simple recluse*, bound by no vows but such as they chose to impose upon themselves.

At these huts the travellers now paused; and after De Coucy had been carried into one of them, the hermit, who had guided the travellers thither, demanded of the Count d'Auvergne, whether any of his train could draw a good bow, and wing a shaft well home.

"They are all archers, good hermit," said D'Auvergne; "see you not their bows and quivers?"

"Many a man wears a sword who cannot use it," replied the hermit, in the cynical tone which seemed natural to him. "Here, your very friend, whom God himself has armed with eyes and ears, and even understanding, such as it is, does he make use of any, when he gallops down a precipice, where he would surely have been killed, had it not been for the aid and protection of a merciful Heaven, and a few stunted hazels? Your archers may make as good use of their bows as he does of his brains—and then, what serves their archery? But, however, choose out the best marksman; bid him go up to yonder peak, and take two well-feathered arrows with him: he will shoot no more! Then send all the rest to beat the valley to the right, with loud cries. The izzards will instantly take to the heights. Let your archer choose as they pass, and deliver me his arrows into the two fattest—(though God knows! 'tis a crying sin to slay two wise beasts to save one foolish man;) but let your vassal stay to make no *curée,* but bring the beasts down here while life-heat is still in them. Your friend, wrapped in the fresh-flayed hides, shall be to-morrow as whole as if he had never played the fool!"

"I have seen it done at Byzantium," replied D'Auvergne, "when a good knight of Flanders was hurled down from the south tower. It had a marvellous effect:—we will about it instantly."

Accordingly, two of the izzards, which were then common in Auvergne, were soon slain in the manner the hermit directed; and De Coucy, notwithstanding no small dislike to the remedy, was stripped, and wrapped in the reeking hides;* after which, stretched upon a bed of dry moss belonging to one of the hermits, he endeavoured to amuse himself with thoughts of love and battles, while the rest went to pay their vows at the shrine of Our Lady of St. Pavin.

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* This is no fantastic remedy, but one of the most effectual the author of this work has ever seen employed. The skin of a sheep, however, is not a whit less potent in its effects than the skin of an izzard.

De Coucy's mind soon wandered through all the battles, and tournaments, and passes of arms that could possibly be fought; and then his fancy, by what was in those days a very natural digression, turned to love—and he thought of all the thousand ladies he had loved in his life; and, upon recollecting all the separate charms of each, he found that they were all very beautiful: he could not deny it. Yet certainly, and beyond all doubt, the fair Isadore of the Mount, with her dark, dark eyes, and her clear, bland brow, and her mouth, such as angels smile with, was far more beautiful than any of them.

But still De Coucy asked himself, why he could not tell her so. He had never found it difficult to tell any one they were beautiful before; or to declare that he loved them; or to ask them for a glove, or a bracelet, or a token to fix in his casque, and be his second in the battle: but now he felt sure that he had stammered like a schoolboy, and spoken below his voice, like a young squire to an old knight. So De Coucy concluded, from all these symptoms, that he could not be in love; and fully convinced thereof, he very naturally fell asleep.

CHAPTER IV.

We must now change the scene, and, leaving wilds and mountains, come to a more busy, though still a rural view. From the small, narrow windows of the ancient château of Compiègne might be seen, on the one side, the forest, with its ocean of green and waving boughs; and on the other, a lively little town on the banks of the Oise, the windings of which river could be traced from the higher towers, far beyond its junction with the Aisne, into the distant country. Yet, notwithstanding that it was a town, Compiègne scarcely detracted from the rural aspect of the picture. It had, even in those days, its gardens and its fruit-trees, which gave it an air of verdure, and blended it, as it were, insensibly with the forest, which waved against its very walls. The green thatches, too, of its houses, in which slate or tile was unknown, covered with moss and lichens, and flowering houseleek, offered not the cold, stiff uniformity of modern roofs; and the eye that looked down upon those constructions of art in its earliest and rudest form, found all the picturesque irregularity of nature.

Gazing from one of the narrow windows of a large square chamber, in the keep of the château, were two beings, who seemed to be enjoying, to the full, those bright hours of early affection, which are well called "the summer days of existence," yielding flowers, and warmth, and sunshine, and splendour;—hours that are so seldom known;—hours that so often pass away like dreams;—hours which are such strangers in courts, that, when they do intrude with their warm rays into the cold precincts of a palace, history marks their coming as a phenomenon, too often followed by a storm.

Alone, in the solitude of that large chamber, those two beings were as if in a world by themselves. The fair girl, seemingly scarce nineteen years of age, with her light hair floating upon her shoulders in large masses of shining curls, leaned her cheek upon her hand, and gazing with her full, soft, blue eyes over the far extended landscape, appeared lost in thought; while her other hand, fondly clasped in that of her companion, pointed out, as it were, how nearly linked he was to her seemingly abstracted thoughts.

The other tenant of that chamber was a man of thirty-two or thirty-three years of age, tall, well-formed, handsome, of the same fair complexion as his companion, but bronzed by the manly florid hue of robust health, exposure, and exercise. His nose was slightly aquiline, his chin rounded and rather prominent, and his blue eyes would have been fine and expressive, had they not been rather nearer together than the just proportion, and stained, as it were, on the very iris, by some hazel spots in the midst of the blue. The effect, however, of the whole was pleasing; and the very defect of the eyes, by its singularity, gave something fine and distinguished to the countenance; while their nearness, joined with the fire that shone out in their glance, seemed to speak that keen and quick sagacity which sees and determines at once, in the midst of thick dangers and perplexity.

The expression, however, of those eyes was now calm and soft, while sometimes holding her hand in his, sometimes playing with a crown of wild roses he had put on his companion's head, he mingled one rich curl after another with the green leaves and the blushing flowers; and, leaning with his left arm against the side of the window, high above her head, as she sat gazing out upon the landscape, he looked down upon the beautiful creature, through the mazes of whose hair his other hand was straying, with a smile strangely mingled of affection for her, and mockery of his own light employment.

There was grace, and repose, and dignity, in his whole figure, and the simple green hunting tunic which he wore, without robe or hood, or ornament whatever, served better to show its easy majesty, than would the robes of a king—and yet this was Philip Augustus.

"So pensive, sweet Agnes!" said he, after a moment's silence, thus waking from her reverie the lovely Agnes de Meranie, whom he had married shortly after the sycophant bishops of France had pronounced the nullity of his unconsummated marriage with Ingerburge,* for whom he had conceived the most inexplicable aversion:—"So pensive," he said. "Where did those sweet thoughts wander?"

"Far, far, my Philip!" replied the Queen, leaning back her head upon his arm, and gazing up in his face with a look of that profound, unutterable affection, which *sometimes* dwells in woman's heart for her first and only love:—"far from this castle, and this court;—far from Philip's splendid chivalry, and his broad realms, and his fair cities; and yet with Philip still. I thought of my own father, and all his tenderness and love for me; and of my own sweet Istria! and I thought how hard is the fate of princes, that some duty always separates them from some of those they love, and——"

"And doubtless you wished to quit your Philip for those whom you love better?" interrupted the king, with a smile at the very charge which he well knew would soon be contradicted.

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* Philip Augustus, after the death of his first wife, being still a very young man, married Ingerburge, sister of Canute, King of Denmark; but on her arrival in France, he was seized with so strong a personal dislike to her, that he instantly convoked a synod of the clergy of France, who, on pretence of kindred in the prohibited degrees, annulled the marriage. Philip afterwards married the beautiful Agnes, or Mary, as she is called by some, daughter of the Duke of Istria and Meranie, a district it would now be difficult to define, but which comprehended the Tyrol and its dependencies, down to the Adriatic.—See Rigord Guil. Brit. Lit. Innoc. III. Cart. Philip II. &c.

"Oh, no! no!" replied Agnes; "but, as I looked out yonder, and thought it was the way to Istria, I wished that my Philip was but a simple knight, and I a humble demoiselle. Then should he mount his horse, and I would spring upon my palfrey; and we would ride gaily back to my native land, and see my father once again, and live happily with those we loved."

"But tell me, Agnes," said Philip, with a tone of melancholy that struck her, "if you were told, that you might to-morrow quit me, and return to your father, and your own fair land, would you not go?"

"Would I quit you?" cried Agnes, starting up, and placing her two hands upon her husband's arm, while she gazed in his face with a look of surprise that had no small touch of fear in it:—"would I quit you?—Never! And if you drove me forth, I would come back and be your servant—your slave; or would watch in the corridors but to have a glance as you passed by;—or else I would die," she added, after a moment's pause, for she had spoken with all the rapid energy of alarmed affection. "But tell me, tell me, Philip, what did you mean? For all your smiling, you spoke gravely.—Nay, kisses are no answers."

"I did but jest, my Agnes," replied Philip, holding her to his heart with a fond pressure. "Part with you! I would sooner part with life!"

As he spoke, the door of the chamber suddenly opened, the hangings were pushed aside, and an attendant appeared.

"How now!" cried the King, unclasping his arms from the slight, beautiful form round which they were thrown. "How now, villain! Must my privacy be broken every moment? How dare you enter my chamber without my call?" And his flashing eye and reddened cheek spoke that quick impatient spirit which never possessed any man's breast more strongly than that of Philip Augustus. And yet, strange to say, the powers of his mind were such, that every page of his history affords a proof of his having made even his most impetuous passions subservient to his policy—not by conquering them, but by giving vent to them in such direction as suited best the exigency of the times, and the interests of his kingdom.

"Sire," replied the attendant, with a profound reverence, "the good knight Sir Stephen Guerin has just arrived from Paris, and prays an audience."

"Admit him," said Philip; and his features, which had expanded like an unstrung bow while in the gentler moments of domestic happiness, and had flashed with the broad blaze of the lightning under the effect of sudden irritation, gradually contracted into a look of grave thought as his famous and excellent friend and minister Guerin approached.

He was a tall, thin man, with strong marked features, and was dressed in the black robe and eight-limbed cross of the order of Hospitallers, which habit he retained even long after his having been elected Bishop of Senlis. He pushed back his hood, and bowed low in sign of reverence as he approached the King; but Philip advanced to meet, and welcomed him with the affectionate embrace of an equal. "Ha! fair brother!" said the King, "what gives us the good chance of seeing you, from our town of Paris? We left you full of weighty matters."

"Matters of still greater weight, beau sire," replied the Hospitaller, "claiming your immediate attention, have made me bold to intrude upon your privacy. An epistle from the good Pope Celestin came yesterday by a special messenger, charging your highness——"

"Hold!" cried Philip, raising his finger as a sign to keep silence. "Come to my closet, brother; we will hear the good bishop's letter in private.—Tarry, sweet Agnes! I have vowed thee three whole days, without the weight of royalty bearing down our hearts; and this shall not detain me long."

"I would not, my lord, for worlds," replied the Queen, "that men should say my Philip neglected his kingdom, or his people's happiness, for a woman's smile. I will wait here for your return, be your business long as it may, and think the time well spent. —Rest you well, fair brother," she added, as it were in reply to a beaming smile that for a moment lighted up the harsh features of the Hospitaller; "cut not short your tale for me."

The minister bowed low, and Philip, after having pressed his lips on the fair forehead of his wife, led the way through a long passage with windows on either side, to a small closet in one of the angular turrets of the castle. It was well contrived for the cabinet of a statesman, for, placed as it was, a sort of excrescence from one of the larger towers, it was cut off from all other buildings, so that no human ear could catch one word of any conversation which passed therein. The monarch entered; and, making a sign to his minister to close the door, he threw himself on a seat, and stretched forth his hand, as if for the pontiff's letter. "Not a word before the Queen!" said he, taking the vellum from the Hospitaller—"Not a word before the Queen, of all the idle cavilling of the Roman church. I would not for all the crowns of Charlemagne, that Agnes should dream of a flaw in my divorce from Ingerburge—though that flaw be no greater a matter than a moat in the sore eyes of the church of Rome.—But let me see! What says Celestin?"

"He threatens you, royal sir," replied the minister, "with excommunication, and anathema, and interdict."

"Pshaw!" cried Philip, with a contemptuous smile; "he has not vigour enough to anathematise a fly! 'Tis a good mild priest; somewhat tenacious of his church's rights,—for, let me tell thee, Stephen, had I but craved my divorce from Rome, instead of from my bishops of France, I should have heard no word of anathema or interdict. It was a fault of policy, so far as my personal quiet is concerned; and there might be somewhat of hasty passion in it too; but yet, good knight, 'twas not without forethought. The grasping church of Rome is stretching out her thousand hands into all the kingdoms round about her, and snatching, one by one, the prerogatives of the throne. The time will come,—I see it well,—when the prelate's foot shall tread upon the prince's crown; but I will take no step to put mine beneath the sandal of St. Peter. No! though the everlasting buzzing of all the crimson flies in the conclave should deafen me outright.—But let me read."

The Hospitaller bowed, and silently studied the countenance of the sovereign, while he perused the letter of the pontiff. Philip's features, however, underwent no change of expression. His brow knit slightly from the first, but no more than so far as to show attention to what he was reading. His lip, too, maintained its contemptuous curl; but that neither increased nor diminished; and when he had done, he threw the packet lightly on the table, exclaiming—"Stingless! stingless! The good prelate will hurt no one!"

"Too true, sire," replied the impassible Guerin; "he will now hurt no one; for he is dead."

"St. Denis to boot!" cried the King. "Dead! Why told you it not before!—Dead! When did he die?—Has the conclave met?—Have they gone to election?—Whom have they adored?*—Who is the pope? Speak, Hospitaller! Speak!"

"The holy conclave have elected the cardinal Lothaire, sire," answered the knight. "Your highness has seen him here in France, as well as at Rome: a man of a great and capacious mind."

"Too great!—too great!" replied Philip, thoughtfully. "He is no Celestin. We shall soon hear more?" And rising from his seat, he paced the narrow space of his cabinet backwards and forwards for several minutes; then paused, and placing one hand on his councillor's shoulder, he laid the forefinger of the other on his breast—"If I could rely on my barons," said he, emphatically,—"if I could rely on my barons;—not that I do not reverence the church, Guerin,—God knows! I would defend it from heathens and heretics, and miscreants, with my best blood. Witness my journey to the Holy Land!—witness the punishment of Amaury!—witness the expulsion of the Jews! But this Lothaire——"

"Now Innocent the Third!" said the minister, taking advantage of a pause in the king's speech. "Why he is a great man, sire—a man of a vast and active mind: firm in his resolves, as he is bold in his undertakings—powerful—beloved. I would have my royal lord think what must be his conduct, if Innocent should take the same view of the affairs of France as was taken by Celestin."

Philip paused, and, with his eyes bent upon the ground, remained for several minutes in deep thought. Gradually the colour mounted in his cheek, and some strong emotion seemed struggling in his bosom, for his eye flashed, and his lip quivered; and, suddenly catching the arm of the Hospitaller, he shook the clenched fist of his other hand in the air, exclaiming—"He will not! He shall not! He dare not!—Oh, Guerin, if I may but rely on my barons!"

"Sire, you cannot do so," replied the knight, firmly. "They are turbulent and discontented; and the internal peace of your kingdom has more to fear from their disloyal practices, than even your domestic peace has from the ambitious intermeddling of Pope Innocent. You must not count upon your barons, Sire, to support you in opposition to the church. Even now, Sir Julian of the Mount, the sworn friend of the Counts of Boulogne and Flanders, has undertaken a journey to Auvergne, which bodes a new coalition against you, Sire. Sir Julian is discontented because you refused him the feof of Beaumetz, which was held by his sister's husband, dead without heirs. The Count de Boulogne you know to be a traitor. The Count of Flanders was ever a dealer in rebellion. The old Count d'Auvergne, though no rebel, loves you not."

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* One of the four methods of electing a Pope is called by *adoration*, which takes place when the first Cardinal who speaks instantly (as is supposed by the movement of the Holy Ghost) does reverence to the person he names, proclaiming him, Pope, to which must be added the instant suffrage of two-thirds of the assembled conclave.

"They will raise a lion!" cried the King, stamping with his foot—"ay, they will raise a lion! Let Sir Julian of the Mount beware! The citizens of Albert demand a charter. Sir Julian claims some ancient privileges. See that the charter be sealed to-morrow, Guerin, giving them right of watch and ward, and wall—rendering them an untailleable and free commune. Thus shall we punish good Sir Julian of the Mount, and flank his fair lands with a free city, which shall be his annoyance, and give us a sure post upon the very confines of Flanders. See it be done! As to the rest, come what may, my private happiness I will subject to no man's will; nor shall it be my hands that stoop the royal sceptre of France to the bidding of any prelate for whom the earth finds room.—Silence, my friend!" he added, sharply; "the King's resolve is taken; and, above all, let not a doubt of the sureness of her marriage reach the ears of the Queen. *I*, Philip of France, say the divorce *shall* stand!—and who is there shall give me the lie in my own land?" Thus saying, the King turned, and led the way back to the apartment where he had left the Queen.

His first step upon the rushes of the room in which she sat woke Agnes de Meraine from her reverie; and though her husband's absence had been but short, her whole countenance beamed with pleasure at his return; while laying on his arm the small white hand, which even monks and hermits have celebrated, she gazed up in his face, as if to see whether the tidings he had heard had stolen anything from the happiness they were before enjoying. Philip's eyes rested on her, full of tenderness and love, and then turned to his minister with an appealing, and almost reproachful look. Guerin felt how difficult, how agonising it would be to part with a being so lovely and so beloved; and with a deep sigh, and a low inclination to the Queen, he quitted the apartment.

CHAPTER V.

In Auvergne, but in a different part of it from that where we left our party of pilgrims, rode onward a personage who seemed to think, with Jacques, that motley is the only wear. Not that he was precisely habited in the piebald garments of the professed fool; but yet his dress was as many coloured as the jacket of my ancient friend Harlequin; and so totally differed from the vestments of that age, that it seemed as if he had taken a jump of two or three centuries, and stolen some gay habit from the court of Charles the Seventh. He wore long tight silk breeches, of a bright flame-colour; a sky-blue cassock of cloth girt round his waist by a yellow girdle, below which it did not extend above three inches, forming a sort of frill about his middle; while, at the same time, this sort of surcoat being without sleeves, his arms appeared from beneath covered with a jacket of green silk, cut close to his shape, and buttoned tight at the wrists. On his head he carried a black cap, not unlike the famous Phrygian bonnet; and he was mounted on a strong grey mare, then considered a ridiculous and disgraceful equipage.

This strange personage's figure no way corresponded with his absurd dress; for, had one desired a model of active strength, it could nowhere have been found better than in his straight and muscular limbs. His face, however, was more in accordance with the extravagance of his habiliments; for, certainly, never did a more curious physiognomy come from the cunning and various hand of Nature. His nose was long, and was seemingly boneless; for, ever and anon, whether from some natural convulsive motion, or from a voluntary and laudable desire to improve upon the singular hideousness of his countenance, this long, sausage-like contrivance in the midst of his face would wriggle from side to side, with a very portentous and uneasy movement. His eyes were large and grey, and did not in the least discredit the nose in whose company they were placed, though they had in themselves a manifest tendency to separate, never having any fixed and determined direction, but wandering about apparently independent of each other, — sometimes far asunder, — sometimes, like Pyramus and Thisbe, wooing each other across the wall of his nose with a most portentous squint. Besides this obliquity, they were endowed with a cold, leadenness of stare, which would have rendered the whole face as meaningless as a mask, had not, every now and then, a still, keen, sharp glance stolen out of them for a moment, like the sudden kindling up of a fire where all seems cold and dead. His mouth was guarded with large thick lips, which extended far and wide through a black and bushy beard; and, when he yawned, which was more than once the case, as he rode through the fertile valleys of Limagne, a great chasm seemed to open in his countenance, exposing, to the very back, two ranges of very white, broad teeth, with their accompanying gums.

For some way, the traveller rode on in quiet, seeming to exercise himself in giving additional ugliness to his features, by screwing them into every sort of form, till he became aware that he was watched by a party of men, whose appearance had nothing in it very consolatory to the journeyer of those days.

The road through the valley was narrow; the hills, rising rapidly on each side, were steep and rugged; and the party which we have mentioned was stationed at some two or three hundred yards before him, consisting of about ten or twelve archers, who, lurking behind a mass of stones and bushes, seemed prepared to impose a toll upon the highway through the valley.

The traveller, however, pursued his journey, though he very well comprehended their aim and object, nor did he exhibit any sign of fear or alarm beyond the repeated wriggling of his nose, till such time as he beheld one of the foremost of the group begin to fit an arrow to his bowstring, and take a clear step beyond the bushes. Then, suddenly reversing his position on the horse, which was proceeding at an easy canter, he placed his head on the saddle, and his feet in the air; and in this position advanced quietly on his way, not at all unlike one of those smart and active gentlemen, who may be seen nightly in the spring-time, circumambulating the area of Astley's Amphitheatre.

The feat which he performed, however simple and legitimate at present, was quite sufficiently extraordinary in those days, to gain him the reputation of a close intimacy with Satan, even if it did not make him pass for Satan himself.

The thunderstruck archer dropped his arrow, exclaiming, "'Tis the devil!" to which conclusion most of his companions readily assented. Nevertheless, one less ceremonious than the rest started forward and bent his bow for the shot. "If he be the devil," cried he, "the more reason to give him an arrow in his liver: what matters it to us whether he be devil or saint, so he have a purse?" As he spoke, he drew his bow to the full extent of his arm, and raised the arrow to his eye. But at the very moment the missile twanged away from the string, the strange horseman we have described let himself fall suddenly across his mare, much after the fashion of a sack of wheat, and the arrow whistled idly over him. Then, swinging himself up again into his natural position, he turned his frightful countenance to the Routiers, and burst into a loud horse-laugh, that had something in its ringing coppery tone truly unearthly.

"Fools!" cried he, riding close up to the astonished plunderers. "Do you think to hurt me? Why, I am your patron saint, the devil. Do not you know your lord and master? But, poor fools, I will give you a morsel. Lay ye a strong band between Vic le Comte and the lake Pavin, and watch there till ye see a fine band of pilgrims coming down. Skin them! skin them, if ye be true thieves! Leave them not a besant to bless themselves!"

Here one of the thieves, moved partly by a qualm of conscience, partly by bodily fear at holding a conversation with a person he most devoutly believed to be the Prince of Darkness, signed himself with the cross — an action not at all unusual amongst the plunderers of that age, who, so far from casting off the bonds of religion at the same time that they threw off all the ties of civil society, were often but the more superstitious and credulous from the very circumstances of their unlawful trade. However, no sooner did the horseman see the sign, than he affected to start. "Ha!" cried he. "You drive me away; but we shall meet again, good friends—we shall meet again, and trust me, I will give you a warm reception. Haw, haw, haw, haw!" and, contorting his face into a most horrible grin, he poured forth one of his fiend-like laughs, and galloped off at full speed.

"Jesu Maria!" cried one of the Routiers, "it is the fiend, certainly—I will give him an arrow, for Heaven's benison!" But whether it was that the bowman's hand trembled, or that the horseman was too far distant, certain it is, he rode on in safety, and did not even know that he had been again shot at.

"I will give the half of the first booty I make to Our Lady of Mount Ferrand," cried one of the robbers, thinking to appease Heaven and guard against Satan, by sharing the proceeds of his next breach of the decalogue with the priest of his favourite saint.

"And I will lay out six sous of Paris on a general absolution!" cried another, whose faith was great in the potency of papal authority.

But, leaving these gentry to arrange their affairs with Heaven as they thought fit, we must follow for a time the person they mistook for their spiritual enemy, and must also endeavour to develope what was passing in his mind, which really did in some degree find utterance; he being one of those people whose lips—those ever unfaithful guardians of the treasures of the heart—are peculiarly apt to murmur forth, unconsciously, that on which the mind is busy. His thoughts burst from him in broken murmured sentences, somewhat to the following effect:—"What matters it to me who is killed!—Say the villains kill the men-at-arms—Haw, haw! haw, haw! 'Twill be rare sport!—And then we will strip them, and I shall have gold, gold, gold! But the men-at-arms will kill the villains. I care not! I will help to kill them:—then I shall get gold too.—Haw, haw, haw! The villains plundered some rich merchants yesterday, and I will plunder them to-morrow. Oh, rare! Then, that Thibalt of Auvergne may be killed in the mêlée, with his cold look and his sneer.—Oh! how I shall like to see the lip, that called me *De Coucy's fool juggler*,—how I shall like to see it grinning with death! I will have one of his white fore-teeth for a mouth-piece to my reed flute, and one of his arm bones polished, to whip tops withal.—Haw, haw, haw! De Coucy's fool juggler!—Haw, haw! haw, haw! Ay, and my good Lord de Coucy!—the beggarly miscreant. He struck me, when I had got hold of a lord's daughter at the storming of Constantinople, and forbade me to show her violence.—Haw, haw! I paid him for meddling with my plunder, by stealing his; and, because I dared not carry it about, buried it in a field at Naples!—but I owe him the blow yet. It shall be paid!—Haw, haw, haw! Shall I tell him now the truth of what he sent me to Burgundy for? — No, no, no! for then he'll sit at home at ease, and be a fine lord; and I shall be thrust into the kitchen, and called for, to amuse the noble knights and dames.—Haw, haw! No, no! he shall wander yet awhile; but I must make up my tale." And the profundity of thought into which he now fell, put a stop to his solitary loquacity; though, ever and anon, as the various fragments of roguery, and villany, and folly, which formed the strange chaos of his mind, seemed, as it were, to knock against each other in the course of his cogitations, he would leer about, with a glance in which shrewdness certainly predominated over idiocy, or would loll his tongue forth from his mouth, and, shutting one of his eyes, would make the other take the whole circuit of the earth and sky around him, as if he were mocking the universe itself; and then, at last, burst out into a long, shrill, ringing laugh, by the tone of which it was difficult to tell whether it proceeded from pain or from mirth.

CHAPTER VI.

The hermit was as good as his word; and in two days De Coucy, though certainly unable to forget that he had had a severe fall, was yet perfectly capable of mounting his horse; and felt that, in the field or at the tournament, he could still charge a good lance, or wield a heavy mace. The night before, had arrived at the chapel the strange personage, some of whose cogitations we have recorded in the preceding chapter; and who, having been ransomed by the young knight in the Holy Land, had become in some sort his bondsman.

On a mistaken idea of his folly, De Coucy had built a still more mistaken idea of his honesty, attributing his faults to madness, and in the carelessness of his nature, looking upon many of his madnesses as virtues. That his intellect was greatly impaired, or rather warped, there can be no doubt; but it seemed, at the same time, that all the sense which he had left, had concentrated itself into an unfathomable fund of villany and malice, often equally uncalled for by others, and unserviceable to himself.

Originally one of the jugglers who had accompanied the second crusade to the Holy Land, he had been made prisoner by the infidels; and, after several years' bondage, had been redeemed by De Coucy, who, from mere compassion, treated him with the greater favour and kindness, because he was universally hated and avoided by every one; though, to say the truth, *Gallon the Fool,* as he was called, was perfectly equal to hold his own part, being vigorous in no ordinary degree, expert at all weapons, and joining all the thousand tricks and arts of his ancient profession, to the sly cunning which so often supplies the place of judgment.

When brought into his lord's presence at the Chapel of the Lake, and informed of the accident which had happened to him, without expressing any concern, he burst into one of his wild laughs, exclaiming, "Haw, haw, haw!—Oh, rare!"

"How now, Sir Gallon the Fool!" cried De Coucy. "Do you laugh at your lord's misfortune?"

"Nay! I laugh to think him nearly as nimble as I am," replied the juggler, "and to find he can roll down a rock of twenty fathom, without dashing his brains out. Why, thou art nearly good enough for a minstrel's fool, Sire de Coucy!—Haw, haw, haw! How I should like to see thee tumbling before a *cour plenière!*"

The knight shook his fist at him, and bade him tell the success of his errand, feeling more galled by the jongleur's jest before the fair Isadore of the Mount, than he had ever felt upon a similar occasion.

"The success of my errand is very unsuccessful," replied the jongleur, wagging his nose, and shutting one of his eyes, while he fixed the other on De Coucy's face. "Your uncle, Count Gaston of Tankerville, will not send you a livre."

"What! is he pinched with avarice?" cried De Coucy. "Have ten years had power to change a free and noble spirit to the miser's griping slavery? My curse upon time! for he not only saps our castles, and unbends our sinews, but he casts down the bulwarks of the mind, and plunders all the better feelings of our hearts. What say you, lady, is he not a true Coterel—that old man with his scythe and hour-glass?"

"He is a bitter enemy, but a true one," replied Isadore of the Mount. "He comes not upon us without warning.—But your man seems impatient to tell out his tale, sir knight; at least so I read the faces he makes."

"Bless your sweet lips!" cried the jongleur; "you are the first, that ever saw my face, that called me man. *Devil* or *fool* are the best names that I get. Prithee, marry my master, and then I shall be *your* man."

De Coucy's heart beat quick at the associations which the juggler's words called up; and the tell-tale blood stole over the fair face of Isadore of the Mount; while old Sir Julian laughed loud, and called it a marvellous good jest.

"Come!" cried De Coucy, "leave thy grimaces, and tell me, what said my uncle? Why would he not send the sums I asked?"

"He said nothing," replied the juggler. "Haw, haw, haw!—He said nothing, because he is dead, and——"

"Hold! hold!" cried De Coucy;—"Dead! God help me, and I taxed him with avarice. Fool, thou hast made me sin against his memory. How did he die?—when—where?"

"Nobody knows when—nobody knows where—nobody knows how!" replied the juggler, with a grin which he could not suppress at his master's grief. "All they know is, that he is as dead as the saints at Jerusalem; and the King and the Duke of Burgundy are quarrelling about his broad lands, which the two fools call moveables! He is dead!—quite dead!—Haw, haw, haw! Haw, haw!"

"Laughest thou, villain!" cried De Coucy, starting up, and striking him a buffet which made him reel to the other side of the hut. "Let that teach thee not to laugh where other men weep!—By my life," he added, taking his seat again, "he was as noble a gentleman, and as true a knight, as ever buckled on spurs. He promised I should be his heir, and doubtless he has kept his word; but, for all the fine lands he has left me—nay, nor for broad France itself, would I have heard the news that have reached me but now!"

"Haw, haw, haw! Haw, haw, haw!" echoed from the other side of the hut.

"Why laughest thou, fool?" cried De Coucy. "Wilt thou never cease thy idiot merriment?—Why laughest thou, I say?"

"Because," replied the jongleur, "if the fair lands thou wouldst not have, the fair lands thou shalt not have. The good Count of Tankerville left neither will nor charter; so that, God willing! the King, or the Duke of Burgundy, shall have the lands, whichever has the longest arm to take, and the strongest to keep. So the Vidame of Besançon bade me say."

"But how is it, my son," said the hermit, who was present, "that you are not heir direct to your uncle's foef, if there be no other heirs?"

"Why, good hermit," replied De Coucy, "uncle and nephew were but names of courtesy between us, because we loved each other. The Count of Tankerville married my father's sister, who died childless; and his affection seemed to settle all in me, then just an orphan. I left him some ten years ago, when but a squire, to take the holy cross; and though I have often heard of him by letter and by message sent across the wide seas, which showed that I was not forgotten, I now return and find him dead, and his lands gone to others. Well! let them go: 'tis not for them I mourn; 'tis that I have lost the best good friend I had."

"You wrong my regard, De Coucy," said the Count d'Auvergne. None is or was more deeply your friend than Thibalt d'Auvergne; and as to lands and gold, good knight, is not one half of all I have due to the man who has three times saved my life?—in the shipwreck, in the battle-field, and in the mortal plague; even were he not my sworn brother in arms?"

"Nay, nay! D'Auvergne, De Coucy's poor," replied the knight; "but he has enough. He is proud too, and, as you know, no vavassor; and, though his lands be small, he is lord of the soil, holding from no one, owing homage and man-service to none—no, not to the King, though you smile, fair Sir Julian. My land is the last *terre libre* in France."

"Send away your fool juggler, De Coucy," said the Count d'Auvergne: "I would speak to you without his goodly presence."

De Coucy made a sign to his strange attendant, who quitted the hut; and the Count proceeded. "De Coucy," he asked, "was it wise to send that creature upon an errand of such import?—Can you rely upon his tale? You know him to be a crackbrained knave.—I am sure he has much malice, and though little understanding, yet infinite cunning. Take my advice! Either go thither yourself, or send some more trusty messenger to ascertain the truth."

"Not I!" cried De Coucy,—"not I! I will neither go nor send, to make the good folks scoff, at the poor De Coucy hankering after estates he cannot have; like a beggar standing by a rich man's kitchen, and snuffing the dishes as they pass him by. Besides, you do Gallon wrong. He is brave as a lion, and grateful for kindness. He would not injure me; and if he would, he has not wit to frame a tale like that. He knew not that I was not my uncle's lawful heir. Oh, no, 'tis true! 'tis true! So let it rest. What care I? I have my lance, and my sword, and knightly spurs; and surely I may thus go through the world, in spite of fortune."

D'Auvergne saw that his friend was determined, and urged his point no further. His own determination, however, was taken, on the very first opportunity to go himself privately, either to Besançon or Dijon, between which places the estates in question lay, and to make those inquires for his friend which De Coucy was not inclined to do himself. Nothing more occurred that night worthy of notice; and the next morning the whole party descending to the shepherd's hut, where their horses had been left, mounted, and proceeded towards Vic le Comte, the dwelling of the Counts of Auvergne.

The hermit, whose skill had been so serviceable to De Coucy, riding on a strong mule, accompanied them on their way.

"I will crave your escort, gentle knights," he said, as they were about to depart. "I am called back against my will, to meddle with the affairs of men—affairs which their own wilful obstinacy, their vile passions, or their gross follies, ever so entangle, that it needs the manifest hand of Heaven to lead them even through one short life. I thought to have done with them; but the King calls for me, and, next to Heaven, my duty is to him."

"What! do we see the famous hermit of the forest of Vincennes?"* demanded old Sir Julian of the Mount, "by whose sage counsels 'tis hoped that Philip may yet be saved from driving his poor vassals to resistance."

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* For a fuller account of this singular person, and the effect his counsels had upon the conduct of Philip Augustus, see Rigord.

"Famous, and a hermit!" exclaimed the recluse, with marked emphasis. "Good, my son! if you sought fame as little as I do, you would not have come from the borders of Flanders to the heart of Auvergne. I left Vincennes to rid myself of the fame they put on me;—you quitted your castle and your peasants, to meddle in affairs you are not fit for. Would you follow my counsel, you would forget your evil errand: see your friend—but as a friend; and, returning to your hall, sit down in peace and charity with all mankind!"

"Ha! what! how?" cried the obstinate old man, angrily, all his complaisant feelings toward the hermit turned into acrimony by this unlucky speech. "Shall I be turned from my purpose by an old enthusiast? I tell thee, hermit, that were it but because thou bidst me not, I would go on to the death! Heaven's life! What I have said I will do, is as immovable as the centre!"

The Count d'Auvergne here interposed; and, promising the hermit safe escort at least, through his father's territories, he led Sir Julian to the front of the cavalcade, and engaged him in a detail of all the important measures which Philip Augustus, during the last five years, had undertaken, and successfully carried through by the advice of that very hermit who followed in their train—measures with which this history has nothing to do, but which may be found faithfully recorded by Rigord, William the Briton, and William of Nangis, as well as many other veracious historians of that age and country.

Sir Julian and the Count were followed by the fair Isadore, with De Coucy by her side, in even a more gay and lively mood than ordinary, notwithstanding the sad news he had heard the night before. Indeed, to judge from his demeanour, it would have seemed that his mind was one of those which, deeply depressed by any of the heavy weights that time is always letting drop upon the human heart, rise up the next moment with a sort of elastic rebound, which instantly casts off the load of care, and spring higher than before. Such, however, was not the case in the present instance. De Coucy was perplexed with new sensations towards Isadore, the nature of which he did not well understand; and, rather than show his embarrassment, he spoke lightly of everything, making himself appear to the least advantage, where, in truth, he wished the most to please.

Isadore's answers were brief; and he felt that he was not at all in the right road to her favour: but still, he was going on, when something accidentally turned the conversation to the friend he had lost in the Count de Tankerville. Happily for Isadore's prepossession in the young knight's favour, it did so; for then, all the deeper, all the finer feelings of his heart awoke, and he spoke of high qualities and generous virtues, as one who knew them from possessing them himself. Isadore's answers grew longer: the chain seemed taken off her thoughts,—and, then, first, that quick and confident communication of feelings and ideas began between her and De Coucy, which, sweet itself, generally ends in something sweeter still. They were soon entirely occupied with each other, and might have continued so, Heaven knows how long! had not De Coucy's squire, Hugo de Barre, who, as before, preceded the cavalcade, suddenly stopped, and, pointing to a confused mass of bushes which, climbing the side of the hill, hid the farther progress of the road, exclaimed—

"I see those bushes move the contrary way to the wind!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" cried a voice from behind,—"haw, haw, haw!"

All was now hurry; for the signs and symptoms which the squire descried, were only attributable to one of those plundering ambuscades, which were anything but rare in those good old times; and the narrowness of road, together with the obstruction of the bushes, totally prevented the knights from estimating the number or quality of their enemies. All then was hurry. The squires hastened forward to give the knights their heavy-armed horses, and to clasp their casques; and the knights vociferated loudly for the archers and varlets to advance, and for Isadore and her women to retire to the rear: but before this could be done, a flight of arrows began to drop amongst them, and one would have certainly struck the lady, or at least her jennet, had it not been for the shield of De Coucy, raised above her head.

De Coucy paused. "Take my shield," he cried, "Gallon the Fool, and hold it over the lady! Guard my lance too! There is no tilting against those bushes!—St. Michael! St. Michael!" he shouted, snatching his ponderous battle-axe from the saddle-bow, and flourishing it round his head, as if it had been a willow wand. A Coucy! A Coucy! St. Michael! St. Michael!" and while the archers of Auvergne shot a close sharp flight of arrows into the bushes, De Coucy spurred on his horse after the Count d'Auvergne, who had advanced with Sir Julian of the Mount, and some of the light-armed squires.

His horse thundered over the ground, and in an instant he was by their side, at a spot where the marauders had drawn a heavy iron chain across the road, from behind which they numbered with their arrows every seemingly feeble spot in the Count's armour.

To leap the chain was impossible; and though Count Thibalt spurred his heavy horse against it, to bear it down, all his efforts were ineffectual. One blow of De Coucy's axe, however, and the chain flew sharp asunder with a ringing sound. His horse bounded forward; and his next blow lighted on the head of one of the chief marauders, cleaving through steel cap, and skull, and brain, as if nothing but air had been opposed to the axe's edge.

It was then one might see how were performed those marvellous feats of chivalry which astonish our latter age. The pikes, the short swords, and the arrows of the Cotereaux, turned from the armour of the knights, as waves from a rock; while De Coucy, animated with the thought that Isadore's eyes looked upon his deeds, out-acted all his former prowess;—not a blow fell from his arm, but the object of it lay prostrate in the dust. The Cotereaux scattered before him like chaff before the wind. The Count d'Auvergne followed on his track, and, with the squires, drove the whole body of marauders, which had occupied the road, down into the valley, while the archers picked off those who had stationed themselves on the hill.

For an instant, the Cotereaux endeavoured to rally behind the bushes, which rendered the movements of the horses both dangerous and difficult; but at that moment a loud ringing "Haw, haw, haw! haw, haw!" burst forth from behind them; and Gallon the Fool, mounted on his mare, armed with De Coucy's lance and shield, and a face whose frightfulness was worth a host, pricked in amongst them; and, to use the phrase of the times, enacted prodigies of valour, shouting between each stroke, "Haw, haw! haw, haw!" with such a tone of fiendish exultation, that De Coucy himself could hardly help thinking him akin to Satan. As to the Cotereaux, the majority believed in his diabolical nature with the most implicit faith; and, shouting "The devil!—the devil!" as soon as they saw him, fled in every direction, by the rocks, the woods, and the mountains. One only stayed to aim an arrow at him, exclaiming, "Devil! he's no devil, but a false traitor, who has brought us to the slaughter; and I will have his heart's blood ere I die." But Gallon, by one of his strange and unaccountable twists, avoided the shaft; and the Coterel was fain to save himself by springing up a steep rock with all the agility of fear.

No sooner was this done, than Gallon the Fool, with that avaricious propensity to which persons in a state of intellectual weakness are often subject, sprang from his mare, and very irreverently casting down De Coucy's lance and shield, began plundering the bodies of two of the dead Cotereaux, leaving them not a rag which he could appropriate to himself.

Seeing him busy in this employment, and perceiving the disrespectful treatment which his arms had met with, De Coucy spurred up to him, and raised his tremendous axe above his head. "Gallon!" cried he, in a voice of thunder.

The jongleur looked up with a grin. "Haw, haw! haw, haw!" cried he, seeing the battle axe swinging above his head, as if in the very act of descending. "You cannot make me wink, Coucy.—Haw, haw!" And he applied himself again to strip the dead bodies with most indefatigable perseverance.

"If it were not for your folly, I would cleave your skull, for daring to use my lance and shield!" cried De Coucy. "But get up! get up!" he added, striking him a pretty severe blow with the back of the axe. "Lay not there, like a red-legged crow, picking the dead bodies. Where is the lady?—Why did you leave her, when I told you to stay?"

"I left the lady, with her maidens, in a snug hole in the rock," replied the juggler, rising unwillingly from his prey; "and seeing you at work with the Cotereaux, I came to help the strongest."

There might be more truth in this reply than De Coucy suspected; but, taken as a jest, it turned away his anger; and bidding Hugo de Barre, who had approached, bring his spear and shield, he rode back to the spot where the combat first began.

Gallon the Fool, had, indeed, as he said, safely bestowed Isadore and her women in one of the caves with which the mountains of Auvergne are pierced in every direction; and here De Coucy found her, together with her father, Sir Julian, who was babbling of an arrow which had passed through his tunic without hurting him.

The Count d'Auvergne had gone, in the meantime, to ascertain that the road was entirely cleared of the banditti; and, during his absence, the lady and her attendants applied themselves to bind up the wounds of one or two of the archers who had been hurt in the affray—a purely female task, according to the customs of the times. The hermit returned with the Count d'Auvergne; and, though he spoke not of it, men remarked that an arrow had grazed his brow; and two rents in his brown robe seemed to indicate that, though he had taken no active part in the struggle, he had not shunned its dangers.

Such skirmishes were so common in those days, that the one we speak of would have been scarcely worth recording, had it not been for two points: first, the effect produced upon the robbers by the strange appearance and gestures of Gallon the Fool; and secondly, the new link which the whole circumstances brought between the hearts of Isadore and De Coucy. In regard to the first, it must be remembered that the appearance of all sorts of evil spirits in an incarnate form was so very frequent in the times whereof we speak, that Rigord cites at least twenty instances thereof, and Guillaume de Nangis brings a whole troop of devils into the very choir of the church. It is not to be wondered at, then, that a band of superstitious marauders, whose very trade would, of course, render them more liable to such diabolical visitations, should suspect so very ugly a personage as Gallon of being the Evil One himself: especially when to his various unaccountable contortions he added the very devil-like act of leading them into a scrape, and then triumphing in their defeat.

But to return to the more respectable persons of my cavalcade. The whole party set out again, retaining, as if by common consent, the same order of march which they had formerly preserved. Nor did Isadore, though as timid and feminine as any of her sex in that day, show greater signs of fear than a hasty glance, every now and then, to the mountains. A slight shudder, too, shook her frame, as she passed on the road three cold, inanimate forms, lying unlike the living, and bearing ghastly marks of De Coucy's battle-axe. But the very sight made her draw her rein towards him, as if from some undefined combination in her mind of her own weakness with his strength, and from the tacit admiration which courage and power command in all ages, but which, in those times, suffered no diminution on the score of humanity.

No lady, of the rank of Isadore of the Mount, ever travelled, in the days we speak of, without a bevy of maidens following her; and as the squires and pages of De Coucy and D'Auvergne were fresh from Palestine, where women were hot-house plants, not exposed to common eyes, it may be supposed that we could easily join to our principal history many a rare and racy episode of love-making which went on in the second rank of our pilgrims; but we shall have enough to do with the personages already before us, ere we lay down our pen, and therefore shall not meddle nor make with the manners of the inferior classes, except where they are absolutely forced on our notice.

Winding down through numerous sunny valleys and rich and beautiful scenery, the cavalcade soon began to descend upon the fertile plains of Limagne, then covered with the blossoms of a thousand trees, and bathed in a flood of loveliness. The ferry over the Allier soon landed them in the sweet valley of Vic le Comte; and Thibalt d'Auvergne, gazing round him, forgot in the view all the agonies of existence, while stretching forth his arms, as if to embrace it, he exclaimed "My native land!"

He had seen the south of Auvergne; he had seen the mountains of D'Or, and the Puy de Dome,—all equally his own; but they spoke but generally to his heart, and could not for a moment wipe out his griefs. But when the scenes of his childhood broke upon his sight; when he beheld everything mingled, in memory, with the first, sweetest impressions in being—everything he had known and joyed in, before existence had a cloud—it seemed as if the last five years had been blotted out of the Book of Fate, and that he was again in the brightness of his youth—the youth of the heart and of the soul, ere it is worn by sorrow, or hardened by treachery, or broken by disappointment.

The valley of Vic is formed by two branches of the mountains of the Forez, which bound it to the east; and in the centre of the rich plain land thus enclosed, stands the fair city of Vic le Comte. It was then as sweet a town as any in the realm of France; and, gathered together upon a gentle slope with the old castle on a high mound behind, it formed a dark pyramid in the midst of the sunshiny valley, being cast into temporary shadow by a passing cloud at the moment the cavalcade approached; while the bright light of the summer evening poured over all the rest of the scene, and the blue mountains, rising high beyond, offered a soft and airy background to the whole. Avoiding the town, Count Thibalt led the way round by a road to the right, and, in a few minutes, they were opposite to the castle, at the distance of about half a mile.

It was a large, heavy building, consisting of an infinite number of towers, of various sizes, and of different forms — some round, some square, all gathered together, without any apparent order, on the top of an eminence which commanded the town. The platform of each tower, whether square or round, was battlemented, and every angle which admitted of such a contrivance, was ornamented with a small turret or watch-tower, which generally rose somewhat higher than the larger one to which it was attached. Near the centre of the building, however, appeared two masses of masonry, distinguished from all the others, — the one, by its size, being a heavy, square tower, or keep, four times as large as any of the rest; and the other by its height, rising, thin and tall, far above every surrounding object. This was called the beffroy, or belfry, and therein stood a watchman night and day, ready, on the slightest alarm, to sound his horn, or ring the immense bell, called *ban cloque,* which was suspended above his head.

From the gate of the castle to the walls of the town, extended a gentle green slope, which, now covered with tents and booths, resembled very much an English fair; and from the spot where D'Auvergne and his companions stood, multitudes of busy beings could be seen moving here and there, in various garbs and colours, some on horseback, some on foot, giving great liveliness to the scene; while besides the unutterable multitude of weathercocks, with which every pinnacle of the castle was adorned, the whole building fluttered, in addition, with a thousand flags, and banners, and streamers, in gay and sparkling confusion.

Before the cavalcade had made a hundred steps beyond the angle of the town, which had previously concealed them from the castle, the eyes of the warder fell upon them; and, in an instant, a loud and clamorous blast of the trumpet issued from the belfry. It was instantly taken up by a whole band in the castle court-yard.

D'Auvergne knew his welcome home, and raised his horn to his lips in reply. At the same instant, every archer in his train, by an irresistible impulse, followed his lord's example. Each man's home was before him, and they blew together, in perfect unison, the famous *Bienvenu Auvergnat,* till the walls, and the towers, and the hills echoed to the sound.

At that moment the gates of the castle were thrown open; and a gallant train of horsemen issued forth, and galloped down towards our pilgrims. At their head was an old man richly dressed in crimson and gold. The fire of his eye was unquenched, the rose of his cheek unpaled, and the only effect of seventy summers to be seen upon him was the snowy whiteness of his hair. D'Auvergne's horse flew like the wind to meet him. The old man and the young one sprang to the ground together. The father clasped his child to his heart, and weeping on his iron shoulder, exclaimed, "My son! my son!"

CHAPTER VII.

Let us suppose the welcome given to all, and the guests within the castle of the Count d'Auvergne, who, warned by messengers of his son's approach, had called his *cour plenière* to welcome the return.

It was one of those gay and lively scenes now seldom met with, where pageant, and splendour, and show were unfettered by cold form and ceremony. The rigid etiquette, which in two centuries after enchained every movement of the French court, was then unknown. Titles of honour rose no higher than Beau Sire, or Monseigneur, and these even were applied more as a mark of reverence for great deeds and splendid virtues, than for wealth and hereditary rank. All was gay and free, and though respect was shown to age and station, it was the respect of an early and unsophisticated age, before the free-will offering of the heart to real dignity and worth had been regulated by the cold rigidity of a law. Yet each person in that day felt his own station, struggled for none that was not his due, and willingly paid the tribute of deference to the grade above his own.

Through the thousand chambers, and the ten thousand passages of the château of Vic le Comte, ran backwards and forwards pages, and varlets, and squires, in proportion to the multitude of guests. Each of these attendants, though performing what would be now considered the menial offices of personal service, to the various knightly and noble visiters, was himself of noble birth, and aspirant to the honours of chivalry. Nor was this the case alone at the courts of sovereign princes like the Count d'Auvergne. Parents of the highest rank were in that age happy to place their sons in the service of the poorest knight, provided that his own exploits gave warranty that he would breed them up to deeds of honour and glory. It was a sort of apprenticeship to chivalry.

All these choice attendants, for the half-hour after Count Thibalt's return, hurried, as we have said, from chamber to chamber, offering their services, and aiding the knights who had come to welcome their young lord, to unbuckle their heavy armour, without the defence of which, the act of travelling, especially in Auvergne, was rash and dangerous. Multitudes of fresh guests were also arriving every moment — fair dames and gallant knights, vassals and vavassours; — some followed by a gay train; some bearing nothing but lance and sword; some carrying themselves their lyre, without which, if known as troubadours, they never journeyed; and some accompanied by whole troops of minstrels, jugglers, fools, rope-dancers, and mimics, whom they brought along with them out of compliment to their feudal chief.

Numbers of these buffoons also were scattered amongst the tents and booths, which we have mentioned, on the outside of the castle-gate; and here, too, were merchants and pedlars of all kinds, who had hurried to Vic le Comte with inconceivable speed, on the very first rumour of a *cour plenière*. In one booth might be seen cloth of gold and silver, velvets, silks, cendals, and every kind of fine stuffs; in another, ermines, minever, and all sorts of furs. Others, again, displayed silver cups and vessels, with golden ornaments for clasping the mantles of the knights and ladies, called *fermailles;* and again, others exhibited cutlery and armour of all kinds; Danish battle-axes, casques of Poitiers, Cologne swords, and Rouen hauberks. Neither was noise wanting. The laugh, the shout, the call, within and without the castle walls, was mingled with the sound of a thousand instruments, from the flute to the hurdy-gurdy; while, at the same time, every point of the scene was fluttering and alive, whether with gay dresses and moving figures, or the pennons, flags, and banners on the walls and pinnacles of the château.

Precisely at the hour of four, a band of minstrels, richly clothed, placed themselves before the great gate of the castle, and performed what was called *corner à l'eau,* which gave notice to every one that the banquet was about to be placed upon the table. At that sound, all the knights and ladies left the chambers to which they had first been marshalled, and assembled in one of the many halls of the castle, where the pages offered to each a silver basin and napkin, to wash their hands previous to the meal.

At this part of the ceremony, De Coucy, Heaven knows how! found himself placed by the side of Isadore of the Mount; and he would willingly have given a buffet to the gay young page who poured the water over her fair hands, and who looked up in her face with so saucy and page-like a grin, that Isadore could not but smile, while she thanked him for his service.

The old Count d'Auvergne stood speaking with his son; and, while he welcomed the various guests as they passed before him with word and glance, he still resumed his conversation with Count Thibalt. Nor did that conversation seem of the most pleasing character; for his brow appeared to catch the sadness of his son's, from which the light of joy, that his return had kindled up, had now again passed away.

"If your knightly word be pledged, my son," said the old Count, as the horns again sounded to table, "no fears of mine shall stay you; but I had rather you had sworn to beard the Soldan on his throne, than to do that which you have undertaken." The conversation ended with a sigh, and the guests were ushered to the banquet-hall.

It was one of those vast chambers, of which few remain to the present day. One, however, may still be seen at La Brède, the château of the famous Montesquieu, of somewhat the same dimensions. It was eighty feet in length, by fifty in breadth; and the roof, of plain dark oak, rose from walls near thirty feet high, and met in the form of a pointed arch in the centre. Neither columns nor pilasters ornamented the sides; but thirty complete suits of mail, with sword, and spear, and shield, battle-axe, mace, and dagger, hung against each wall; and over every suit projected a banner, either belonging to the house of Auvergne, or won by some of its members in the battle-field. The floor was strewed thickly with green leaves; and on each space left vacant on the wall by the suits of armour was hung a large branch of oak, covered with its foliage. From such simple decorations bestowed upon the hall itself, no one would have expected to behold a board laid out with as much splendour and delicacy as the most scrupulous gourmand of the present day could require to give savour to his repast.

The table, which extended the whole length of the hall, was covered with fine damask linen—a manufacture the invention of which, though generally attributed to the seventeenth century, is of infinitely older date. Long benches, covered with tapestry, extended on each side of the table; and the place of every guest was marked, even as in the present times, by a small round loaf of bread, covered with a fine napkin embroidered with gold. By the side of the bread lay a knife, though the common girdle dagger often saved the lord of the mansion the necessity of providing his guests with such implements. To this was added a spoon of silver; but forks there were none, their first mention in history being in the days of Charles the Fifth of France.

A row of silver cups also ornamented both sides of the board; the first five on either hand being what were called *hanaps*, which differed from the others in being raised upon a high stem, after the fashion of the chalice. Various vases of water and of wine, some of silver, some of crystal, were distributed in different parts of the table, fashioned for the most part in strange and fanciful forms, representing dragons, castles, ships, and even men; and an immense mass of silver and gold, in the different shapes of plates and goblets, blazed upon two buffets, or *dressoirs*, as they are called by Helenor de Poitiers, placed at the higher part of the hall, near the seat of the Count himself.

Thus far, the arrangements differed but little from those of our own times. What was to follow, however, was somewhat more in opposition to the ideas of the present day. The doors of the hall were thrown open, and the splendid train of knights and ladies, which the *cour plenière* had assembled, entered to the banquet. The Count d'Auvergne first took his place in a chair with *dossier* and *dais*, as it was particularized in those days, or, in other words, high raised back and canopy. He then proceeded to arrange what was called the *assiette* of the table; namely, that very difficult task of placing those persons together whose minds and qualities were best calculated to assimilate: a task, on the due execution of which the pleasure of such meetings must ever depend, but which will appear doubly delicate, when we remember that then each knight and lady, placed side by side, ate from the same plate, and drank from the same cup.

That sort of quick perception of proprieties, which we now call *tact*, belongs to no age; and the Count d'Auvergne, in the thirteenth century, possessed it in a high degree. All his guests were satisfied; and De Coucy drank out of the same cup as Isadore of the Mount.

They were deliriating draughts he quaffed; and he now began to feel that he had never loved before. The glance of her bright eye, the touch of her small hand, the sound of her soft voice, seemed something new, and strange, and beautiful to him; and he could hardly fancy that he had known anything like it ere then. The scene was gay and lovely; and there were all those objects and sounds around which excite the imagination and make the heart beat high,—glitter, and splendour, and wine, and music, and smiles, and beauty, and contagious happiness. The gay light laugh, the ready jest, the beaming look, the glowing cheek, the animated speech, and the joyous tale, were there; and ever and anon, through the open doors, burst a wild swelling strain of horns and flutes—rose for a moment over every other sound, and then died away again into silence.

What words De Coucy said, and how those words were said; and what Isadore felt, and how she spoke it not, we will leave to the imagination of those who may have been somewhat similarly situated. Nor will we farther prolong the description of the banquet — a description perhaps too far extended already—by detailing all the various yellow soups and green, the storks, the peacocks, and the boars; the castles that poured forth wine, and the pyramids of fifty capons, which from time to time covered the table. We have already shown all the remarkable differences between a banquet of that age and one given in our own, and also some of the still more remarkable similarities.

At last, when the rays of the sun, which had hitherto poured through the high windows on the splendid banquet-table, so far declined as no longer to reach it, the old Count d'Auvergne filled his cup with wine, and raised his hand as a sign to the minstrels behind his chair, when suddenly they blew a long loud flourish on their trumpets, and then all was silent. "Fair knights and ladies!" said the Count, "before we go to hear our troubadours beneath our ancient oaks, I once more bid you welcome all; and though here be none but true and valiant knights, to each of whom I could well wish to drink, yet there is one present to whom Auvergne owes much, and whom I—old as I am in arms—pronounce the best knight in France. Victor of Ascalon and Jaffa; five times conqueror of the infidel, in ranged battle; best lance at Zara, and first planter of a banner on the imperial walls of Byzantium—but more to me than all—saviour of my son's life—Sir Guy de Coucy, good knight and true, I drink to your fair honour!—do me justice in my cup;" and the Count, after having raised his golden *hanap* to his lips, sent it round by a page to De Coucy.

De Coucy took the cup from the page, and with a graceful abnegation of the praises bestowed upon him, pledged the father of his friend. But the most remarkable circumstance of the ceremony was, that it was Isadore's cheek that flushed and Isadore's lip that trembled, at the great and public honour shown to De Coucy, as if the whole embarrassment thereof had fallen upon herself.

The guests now rose, and, led by the Count d'Auvergne, proceeded to the forest behind the château, where, under the great feudal oak, at whose foot all the treaties and alliances of Auvergne were signed, they listened to the songs of the various troubadours, many of whom were found amongst the most noble of the knights present.

We are so accustomed to look upon all the details of the age of chivalry as fabulous, that we can scarcely figure to ourselves men whose breasts were the mark and aim of every danger, whose hands were familiar with the lance and sword, and whose best part of life was spent in battle and bloodshed, suddenly casting off their armour, and, seated under the shadow of an oak, singing lays of love and tenderness in one of the softest and most musical languages in the world. Yet so it was, and however difficult it may be to transport our mind to such a scene, and call up the objects as distinct and real, yet history leaves no doubt of the fact, that the most daring warriors of Auvergne —and Auvergne was celebrated for bold and hardy spirits— were no less famous as troubadours than knights; and as they sat round the Count, they, one after another, took the citharn or the rote, and sung, with a slight monotonous accompaniment, one of the sweet lays of their country.

There is only one, however, whom we shall particularize. He was a slight fair youth, of a handsome but somewhat feminine aspect. Nevertheless, he wore the belt and spurs of a knight; and by the richness of his dress, which glittered with gold and crimson, appeared at least endowed with the gifts of fortune. During the banquet, he had gazed upon Isadore of the Mount far more than either the lady beside whom he sat, or De Coucy, admired; and there was a languid and almost melancholy softness in his eye, which Isadore's lover did not at all like. When called upon to sing, by the name of the Count de la Roche Guyon, he took his harp from a page, and sweeping it with a careless but a confident hand, again fixed his eyes upon Isadore, and sang with a sweet, full, mellow voice, in the Provençal or Langue d'oc, though his name seemed to bespeak a more northern extraction.

TROUBADOUR'S SONG.

"My love, my love, my lady love!
What can with her compare?
The orbs of Heaven she's far above,
No flower is half so fair.

Her cheeks are like the summer sky,
Before the sun goes down—
Faint roses, like the hues that lie
Beneath Night's tresses brown.

Her eye itself is like that star,
Which, sparkling through the sky,
Lifts up its diamond look afar,
Just as Day's blushes die.

Her lip alone, the new-born rose ;
  Her breath, the breath of spring ;
Her voice is sweet as even those
  Of angels when they sing.

A thousand congregated sweets
  Deck her beyond compare ;
And fancy's self no image meets
  So wonderfully fair.

I'd give my barony to be
  Beloved for a day :
But, oh ! her heart is not for me !
  Her smile is given away."

"By my faith ! she must be a hard-hearted damsel, then !" said old Julian of the Mount, "if she resist so fair a troubadour. —But, Sir Guy de Coucy, let not the Langue d'oc carry it off entirely from us of the Langue d'oyl. So gallant a knight must love the lyre. I pray thee ! sing something, for the honour of our Trouvères."

De Coucy would have declined, but the Count Thibalt pressed him to the task, and named the siege of Constantinople as his theme. At the same time the young troubadour who had just sung offered him his harp, saying, "I pray you, Beau Sire, for the honour of your lady !"

De Coucy bowed his head, and took the instrument, over the strings of which he threw his hand, in a bold but not unskilful manner ; and then, joining his voice, sung the taking of Zara and first siege of Constantinople ; after which he detailed the delights of Greece, and showed how difficult it was for the knights and soldiers to keep themselves from sinking into the effeminacy of the Greeks, while encamped in the neighbourhood of Byzantium, waiting the execution of their treaty with the Emperor Isaac and his son Alexis. He then spoke of the assassination of Alexis, the usurpation of Murzuphlis, and the preparation of the Francs to punish the usurper. His eye flashed ; his tone became more elevated, and drawing his accompaniment from the lower tones of the instrument, he poured forth an animated description of the last day of the empire of the Greeks.

De Coucy then went on to describe the shining but effeminate display of the Greek warriors on the walls, and the attack of the city by sea and land. In glowing language he depicted both the great actions of the assault and of the defence; the effect of the hell-invented Greek fire; of the catapults, the mangonels, the darts of flame shot from the walls; as well as the repeated repulses of the Francs, and the determined and unconquerable valour with which they pursued their purpose of punishing the Greeks. Abridging his lay as he went on, he left out the names of many of the champions, and touched but slightly on the deeds of others.

But with increasing energy at every line, he proceeded to sing the mixed fight upon the battlements, after the Francs had once succeeded in scaling them, till the Greeks gave way, and he concluded by painting the complete triumph of the Francs.

All eyes were bent on De Coucy;—all ears listened to his lay. The language, or rather dialect, in which he sang, the Langue d'oyl, was not so sweet and harmonious as the Langue d'oc, or Provençal, it is true, but it had more strength and energy. The subject, also, was more dignified; and as the young knight proceeded to record the deeds in which he had himself been a principal actor, his whole soul seemed to be cast into his song:—his fine features assumed a look between the animation of the combatant and the inspiration of the poet. It seemed as if he forgot everything around, in the deep personal interest which he felt in the very incidents he recited: his utterance became more rapid; his hand swept like lightning over the harp; and when he ended his song and laid down the instrument, it was as if he did so but in order to lay his hand upon his sword.

A pause of deep silence succeeded for a moment, and then came a general murmur of applause; for, in singing the deeds of the Francs at Constantinople, De Coucy touched, in the breast of each person present, that fine chord called national vanity, by which we attach a part of every sort of glory, gained by our countrymen, to our own persons, however much we may recognise that we are incompetent to perform the actions by which it was acquired.

CHAPTER VIII.

The existence of a monarch, without his lot be cast amidst very halcyon days indeed, is much like the life of a seaman, borne up upon uncertain and turbulent waves. Exposed to a thousand storms, from which a peasant's cot would be sufficient shelter, his whole being is spent in watching for the tempest, and his whole course is at the mercy of the wind.

It was with bitterness of heart, and agony of spirit, that Philip Augustus saw gathering on the political horizon around many a dark cloud that threatened him with a renewal of all those fatigues, anxieties, and pains, from which he had hoped, at least, for some short respite. He saw it with a wrung and burning bosom, but he saw it without dismay; for, strong in the resources of a mind above his age, he resolved to wreak great and signal vengeance on the heads of those who should trouble his repose; and, knowing that the sorrow must come, he prepared, as ever with him, to make his revenge a handmaid to his policy, and, by the punishment of his rebellious vassals, not only to augment his own domains as a feudal sovereign, but to extend the general force and prerogative of the crown, and form a large basis of power on which his successors might build a fabric of much greatness.

However clearly he might see the approach of danger, and however vigorously he might prepare to repel it, Philip was not of that frame of mind which suffers remote evil long to interfere with present enjoyment. For a short space he contemplated them painfully, though firmly; but soon the pain was forgotten, and like a veteran soldier who knows he may be attacked during the night, and sleeps with his arms beside him, but still sleeps tranquilly, Philip saw the murmured threatening of his greater feudatories, and took every means of preparation against what he clearly perceived would follow; but this once done, he gave himself up to pleasures and amusements; seeming anxious to crowd into the short space of tranquillity that was left him, all the gaieties and enjoyments which might otherwise have been scattered through many years of peace. Fêtes, and pageants, and tournaments succeeded each other rapidly; and Philip of France, with his fair queen, seemed to look upon earth as a garden of smiles, and life as a long chain of unbroken delights.

Yet, even in his pleasures, Philip was politic. He had returned to Paris, though the summer heat had now completely set in, and June was far advanced; and sitting in the old palace on the island, he was placed near one of the windows, through which poured the free air of the river, while he arranged with his beloved Agnes the ceremonies of a banquet. Philip was famous for his taste in every sort of pageant; and now he was giving directions himself to various attendants who stood round, repeating with the most scrupulous exactness every particular of his commands, as if the very safety of his kingdom had depended on their correct execution.

While thus employed, his minister Guerin, now elected Bishop of Senlis, though he still, as I have said, retained the garments of the knights of St. John, entered the apartment, and stood by the side of the King, while he gave his last orders, and sent the attendants away.

"Another banquet, Sire!" said the Bishop, with that freedom of speech which in those days was admitted between king and subject; and speaking in the grave and melancholy tone which converts an observation into a reproach.

"Ay, good brother!" replied Philip, looking up smilingly; "another banquet in the great *salle du palais;* and on the tenth of July a tournament at Champeaux. Sweet Agnes! laugh at his grave face! Wouldest thou not say, dear lady mine, that I spake to the good Bishop of a defeat and a funeral, instead of a feast and a *passe d'armes?*"

"The defeat of your finances, Sire, and the burial of your treasury," replied Guerin, coldly.

"I have other finances that you know not of, Bishop," replied the King, still keeping his good humour. "Ay, and a private treasury too, where gold will not be wanting."

"Indeed, my liege!" replied the Bishop. "May I crave where?" Philip touched the hilt of his sword. "Here is an unfailing measure of finance!" said he; "and as for my treasury, 'tis in the purses of revolted barons, Guerin!"

"If you make use of that treasury, Sire," answered the Bishop, "for the good of your state, and the welfare of your people, 'tis indeed one that may serve you well; but if you spend it——." The Bishop paused, as if afraid of proceeding, and Philip took up the word.

"If I spend it, you would say, in feasting and revelry," said the King, "I shall make the people murmur, and my best friends quit me. But," continued he, in a gayer tone, "let us quit all sad thoughts, and talk of the feast,—the gay and splendid feast,—where you shall smile, Guerin, and make the guests believe you the gentlest counsellor that ever king was blest withal. Nay, I will have it so, by my faith! As to the guests, they are all choice and gay companions, whom I have chosen for their merriment. Thou shalt laugh heartily when placed between Philip of Champagne, late my sworn enemy, but who now becomes my good friend and humble vassal, and brings his nephew and ward, the young Thibalt, Count of all Champagne, to grace his suzerain's feast—when placed between him, I say, and Pierre de Courtenay, whose allegiance is not very sure, and whose brother, the Count of Namur, is in plain rebellion. There shalt thou see also Bartholemi de Roye, and the Count de Perche, both somewhat doubtful in their love to Philip, but who, before that feast is over, shall be his humblest creatures. Fie, fie, Guerin!" he added, in a more reproachful tone, "will you never think that I have a deeper motive for my actions than lies upon the surface? As to the tournament, too, think you I do not propose to try men's hearts as well as their corslets, and see if their loyalty hold as firm a seat as they do themselves?"

"I never doubt, Sire," replied the Bishop, "that you have good and sufficient motives for all your actions; but, this morning, a sad account has been laid before me of the royal domains; and when I came to hear of banquets and tournaments, it pained me to think what you, Sire, would feel, when you saw the clear statement."

"How so?" cried Philip Augustus. "It cannot be so very bad!—Let me see it, Guerin!—let me see it. 'Tis best to front such things at once.—Let me see it, man, I say!"

"I have it not here, Sire," answered the Bishop; "but I will send it by the clerk who drew it up; and who can give you farther accounts, should it be necessary."

"Quick, then!" cried the King,—"quick, good Bishop!" And walking up and down the hall, with an unquiet and somewhat irritated air, he repeated, "It cannot be so bad! The last time I made the calculation, 'twas somewhere near a hundred thousand livres. Bad enough, in truth—but I have known that long! Now, Sir Clerk," he continued, as a secretary entered, "read me the account, if it be as I see on wax. Was no parchment to be had, that you must draw the charter on wax* to blind me? Read, read!"

The King spoke in the hasty manner of one whose brighter hopes and wishes—for Imagination is always a great helpmate to Ambition, and as well as its first prompter, is its indefatigable ally—in the manner of one whose brighter hopes and wishes had been cut across by cold realities; and the clerk replied in the dull and snuffling tone peculiar to clerks, and monstrously irritating to every hasty man.

"Accounts of the Prévôt de Soissons, Sire," said the clerk: "Receipts: six hundred livres, seven sous, two deniers. Expenses: eighteen livres, to arm three cross-bow-men; twenty livres to the holy clerk; seventy livres for clothing and arming twenty serjeants on foot. Accounts of the sénéchal of Pontoise," continued the clerk, in the same slow and solemn manner: Receipts: five hundred livres, *Parisis.* Expenses: thirty-three livres, for wax-tapers for the church of the blessed St. Millon; twenty-eight sous for the carriage to Paris of the two living lions, now at the kennel of the wolf hounds, without the walls; twenty livres, spent for the robes for four judges; and baskets for twenty eels—for seventeen young wolves."

"Death to my soul!" cried the impatient King: "make an end, man!—come to the sum total! How much remains?"

"Two hundred livres, six sous, one denier," replied the clerk.

"Villain, you lie!" cried the enraged monarch, striking him with his clenched fist, and snatching the tablets from his hand. "What! am I a beggar? 'Tis false, by the light of heaven!—It cannot be," he added, as his eye ran over the sad statement of his exhausted finances,—"it cannot surely be! Go, fellow! bid the Bishop of Senlis come hither! I am sorry that I struck thee. Forget it! Go, bid Guerin hither,—quick!"

While this was passing, Agnes de Meranie had turned to one of the windows, and was gazing out upon the river and the view beyond. She would fain have made her escape from the hall, when first she found the serious nature of the business that had arisen out of the preparations for the fête; but Philip stood between her and either of the doors, both while he was speaking with his minister, and while he was receiving the statement from the clerk; and Agnes did not choose, by crossing him, to call his attention from his graver occupation. As soon, however, as the clerk was gone, Philip's eye fell upon her, as she leaned against the casement, with her slight figure bending in as graceful an attitude as the Pentelican marble was ever taught to show; and there was something in her very presence reproved the monarch for the unworthy passion into which he had been betrayed. When a man loves deeply, he would fain be a god in the eyes of the woman that he loves, lest the worship that he shows her should lessen him in his own. Philip was mortified that she had been present; and lest anything equally mortal should escape him while speaking with his minister, he approached and took her hand.

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* Later instances exist of wax having been used in the accounts of the royal treasury of France.

"Agnes," said he, "I have forgot myself; but this tablet has crossed me sadly," pointing to the statement. "I shall be no longer able to give festal orders. Go you, sweet! and, in the palace gardens, bid your maidens strip all the fairest flowers to deck the tables and the hall——"

"They shall spare enough for one crown, at least," replied Agnes, "to hang on my royal Philip's casque on the tournament-day. But I will speed, and arrange the flowers myself." Thus saying, she turned away, with a gay smile, as if nothing had ruffled the current of the time; and left the monarch expecting thoughtfully the Bishop of Senlis's return.

The minister did not make the monarch wait; but he found Philip Augustus in a very different mood from that in which he left him.

"Guerin," said the King, with a grave and careful air, "you have been my physician, and a wise one. The cup you have given me is bitter, but 'tis wholesome; and I have drunk it to the dregs."

"It is ever with the most profound sorrow," said the Hospitaller, with that tone of simple persuasive gravity that carries conviction of its sincerity along with it, "that I steal *one* from the few scanty hours of tranquillity that are allotted to you, Sire, in this life. Would it were compatible with your honour and your kingdom's welfare, that I should bear all the more burthensome part of the task which royalty imposes, and that you, Sire, should know but its sweets! But that cannot be; and I am often obliged, as you say, to offer my sovereign a bitter cup that willingly I would have drunk myself."

"I believe you, good friend—from my soul, I believe you!" said the King. "I have ever observed in you, my brother, a self-denying zeal, which is rare in this corrupted age; or used but as the means of ambition. Raise not your glance as if you thought I suspected you. Guerin, I do not! I have watched you well; and had I seen your fingers itch to close upon the staff of power,—had you but stretched out your hand towards it,—had you sought to have left me in idle ignorance of my affairs,—ay! or even sought to weary me of them with eternal reiteration, you never should have seen the secrets of my heart, as now you shall—I would have used you, Guerin, as an instrument, but you never would have been my friend. Do you understand me, ha?"

"I do, royal sir," replied the knight, "and God help me, as my wish has ever been only to serve you truly!"

"Mark me, then, Guerin!" continued the King. "This banquet must go forward—the tournament also—ay, and perhaps another. Not because I love to feast my eyes with the grandeur of a king—no, Guerin,—but because I would be a king indeed! I have often asked myself," proceeded the monarch, speaking slowly, and, as was sometimes his wont, laying the finger of his right-hand on the sleeve of the Hospitaller's robe —"I have often asked myself whether a king would never fill the throne of France, who should find time and occasion fitting to carry royalty to that grand height where it was placed by Charlemagne. Do not start! I propose not—I hope not—to be the man; but I will pave the way, tread it who will hereafter. I speak not of acting Charlemagne with this before my eyes;" and he laid his hand upon the tablets, which showed the state of his finances. "But still I may do much—nay, I have done much."

Philip paused, and thought for a moment, seeming to recall, one by one, the great steps he had taken to change the character of the feudal system; then raising his eyes, he continued:—"When the sceptre fell into my grasp, I found that it was little more dignified than a jester's bauble. France was not a kingdom,—'twas a republic of nobles, of which the king could hardly be said to be the chief. He had but one prerogative left,—that of demanding homage from his vassals; and even that homage he was obliged to render himself to his own vassals, for feofs held in their *mouvances*. At that abuse was aimed my first blow."

"I remember it well, Sire," replied the Hospitaller, "and a great and glorious blow it was; for, by that simple declaration, that the King could not and ought not to be vassal to any man, and that any feof returning to the crown by what means soever, was no longer a feof, but became *domaine* of the crown, you re-established at once the distinction between the King and his great feudatories."

"'Twas but a step," replied the monarch; "the next was, Guerin, to declare that all questions of feudal right were referable to our court of peers. The proud suzerains thought that there they would be their own judges; but they found that I was there the King. But, to be short,—Guerin, *I* have followed *willingly* the steps that *circumstances* imposed upon my father. I have freed the commons,—I have raised the clergy,—I have subjected my vassals to my court. So have I broken the feudal hierarchy;—so have I reduced the power of my greater feudatories; and so have I won both their fear and their hatred. It is against that I must guard. The lesser barons love me—the clergy—the burghers;—but that is not enough; I must have one or two of the sovereigns. Then let the rest revolt if they dare! By the Lord that liveth! if they do, I will leave the *domaines* of the crown to my son, tenfold multiplied from what I found them. But I must have one or two of my princes. Philip of Champagne is one on whom words and honours work more than real benefits. He must be feasted and set on my right-hand. Pierre de Courtney is one whose heart and soul is on chivalry; and he must be won by tournaments and lance-breakings. Many, many others are alike; and while I crush the wasps in my gauntlet, Guerin, I must not fail to spread out some honey to catch the flies." So spake Philip Augustus, with feelings undoubtedly composed of that grand selfishness called ambition; but, at the same time, with those superior powers, both of conception and execution, that not only rose above the age, but carried the age along with him.

"I am not one, Sire," said the minister, "to deem that great enterprises may not be accomplished with small means; but, in the present penury of the royal treasury, I know not what is to be done. I will see, however, what may be effected amongst your good burghesses of Paris."

"Do so, good Bishop!" replied the King, "and in the meantime I will ride forth to the Hermit of Vincennes. He is one of those men, Guerin, of whom earth bears so few, who have new thoughts. He seems to have cast off all old ideas and feelings, when he threw from him the corslet and the shield, and took the frock and sandal. Perhaps he may aid us. But, ere I go, I must take good order that every point of ceremony be observed in our banquet: I would not, for one half France, that Philip of Champagne should see a fault or a flaw! I know him well; and he must be my own, if but to oppose to Ferrand of Flanders, who is the falsest vassal that ever king had!"

"I trust that the Hermit may suggest the means!" replied Guerin, "and I doubt little that he will; but I beseech you, Sire, not to let your blow fall on the heads of the Jews again. The Hermit's advice was wise, to punish them for their crimes, and at the same time to enrich the crown of France; but having now returned by your royal permission, and having ever since behaved well and faithfully, they should be assured of protection."

"Fear not, fear not!" replied the King; "they are as safe as my honour can make them." So saying, he turned to prepare for the expedition he proposed.

Strange state of society! when one of the greatest monarchs that France ever possessed was indebted, on many occasions, for the re-establishment of his finances, and for some of his best measures of policy, to an old man living in solitude and abstraction, removed from the scenes and people over whose fate he exercised so extraordinary a control, and evincing, on every occasion, his disinclination to mingle with the affairs of the world.*

But it is time we should speak more fully of a person whose history and influence on the people amongst whom he lived, strongly developes the character of the age.

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* The Chronicle of Alberic des Trois Fontaines gives some curious particulars concerning this personage, and offers a singular picture of the times.

CHAPTER IX.

King Philip rode out of Paris attended like the monarch of a great nation; but, pausing at the tower of Vincennes, he left his men-at-arms behind; and, after throwing a brown mantle over his shoulders, and drawing the *aumuce*,* or furred hood round his face, he proceeded through the park on foot, followed only by a single page to open the gate, which led out into the vast forest of St. Mandé. When this task was performed, the attendant, by order of the monarch, suffered him to proceed alone, and waited on the outside of the postern, to admit the King on his return.

Philip Augustus took a small path that, wandering about amidst the old trees, led on into the heart of the forest. All was in thick leaf; and the branches, meeting above, cast a green and solemn shadow over the way. It was occasionally crossed, however, with breaks of yellow sunshine where the trees parted; and there the eye might wander down the long, deep glades, in which sun and shade, and green leaves, and broad stems, and boughs, were all seen mingled together in the dim forest air, with an aspect of wild, original solitude, such as wood scenery alone can display.

One might have fancied oneself the first tenant of the world, in the sad loneliness of that dark old wood; so that, as he passed along, deep thoughts of a solemn, and even melancholy character came thick about the heart of the monarch. The littleness of human grandeur—the evanescence of enjoyment—the emptiness of fame—the grand and awful lessons that solitude teaches, and the world wipes out, found their moment then: and, oh! for that brief instant, how he hated strife, and cursed ambition, and despised the world, and wished himself the solitary anchorite he went to visit!

At about half a league from the tower of Vincennes stood in those days an antique tomb. The name and fame of him whose memory it had been intended to perpetuate, had long passed away; and it remained in the midst of the forest of St. Mandé, with its broken tablets and effaced inscription, a trophy to oblivion. Near it, Bernard the Hermit had built his hut; and when the monarch approached, he was seated on one of the large fragments of stone which had once formed part of the monument. His head rested on one hand; while the other, fallen by his side, held an open book; and at his feet lay the fragments of an urn in sculptured marble. Over his head, an old oak spread its wide branches; but through a vacant space amidst the foliage, where either age or the lightning had riven away one of the great limbs of the forest giant, the sunshine poured through, and touching on the coarse folds of the hermit's garments, passed on, and shone bright upon the ruined tomb.

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* The difference between the chaperon, or hood, and the aumuce was, that the first was formed of cloth or silk, and the latter of fur.—*Dic. des Franc.*

As Philip approached, the hermit raised his eyes, but dropped them again immediately. He was known to have, as it were, fits of this sort of abstraction, the repeated interruption of which had so irritated him, that, for a time, he retired to the mountains of Auvergne, and only returned at the express and repeated request of the King. He was now, if one might judge by the morose heaviness of his brow, buried in one of those bitter and misanthropical reveries into which he often fell; and the monarch, knowing his cynical disposition, took care not to disturb the course of his ideas, by suddenly presenting any fresh subject to his mind. Neither, to say the truth, were the thoughts of the King very discordant with those which probably occupied the person he came to see. Sitting down, therefore, on the stone beside him, without giving or receiving any salutation, he remained in silence, while the hermit continued gazing upon the tomb.

"Beautiful nature!" said the old man, at last. "How exquisitely fine is every line thou hast chiselled in yon green ivy that twines amongst those stones!—Whose tomb was that, my son?"

"In truth, I know not, good father!" replied the King; "and I do not think that in all France there is a man wise enough to tell you."

"You mock me!" said the hermit. "Look at the laurel—the never-dying leaf—the ever, ever green bay, which some curious hand has carved all over the stone, well knowing that the prince or warrior who sleeps there should be remembered till the world is not! I pray thee, tell me whose is that tomb?"

"Nay, indeed, it is unknown," repeated the King. "Heaven forbid that I should mock you! The inscription has been long effaced—the name for centuries forgot; and the living in their busy cares have taken little heed to preserve the memory of the dead."

"So shall it be with thee," said the old man—"so shall it be with thee. Thou shalt do great deeds; thou shalt know great joys, and taste great sorrows! Magnified in thy selfishness, thy littleness shall seem great. Thou shalt strive and conquer, till thou thinkest thyself immortal; then die, and be forgotten! Thy very tomb shall be commented upon by idle speculation, and men shall come and wonder for whom it was constructed. Do not men call thee Augustus?"*

"I have heard so," answered Philip. "But I know not whether such a title be general in the mouths of men, or whether it be the flattery of some needy sycophant."

"It matters not, my son," said the hermit—"it matters not. Think you, that if Augustus had been written on that tablet, the letters of that word would have proved more durable than those that time has long effaced? Think you, that it would have given one hour of immortality?"

"Good father, you mistake!" rejoined the Monarch, "and read me a homily on that where least I sin. None feels more than I the emptiness of fame. Those that least seek it, very often win; and those that struggle for it with every effort of their soul, die unremembered. 'Tis not fame I seek: I live in the present."

"What!" cried the hermit, "and bound your hopes to half-a-dozen morrows? The present! What is the present? Take away the hours of sleep—of bodily, of mental pain—of regrets for the past—of fears for the future—of all sorts of cares, and what is the present? One short moment of transitory joy—a point in the wide eternity of thought!—a drop of water to a thirsty man, tasted and then forgot!"

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* The name of Augustus was given to Philip the Second, even in the earlier part of his lifetime, although Mézerai mistakingly attributes it to many centuries afterwards. Rigord, the historian and physician, who died in the twenty-eighth year of Philip's reign, and the forty-second of his age, styles him Augustus, in the very title of his manuscript.

"'Tis but too true!" replied the King; "and even now, as I came onward, I dreamed of casting off the load of sovereignty, and seeking peace."

The hermit gazed at him for a moment, and seeing that he spoke gravely—"It cannot be," he said. "It must not be!"

"And why not?" demanded the King. "All your reasoning has tended but to that. Why should I not take the moral to myself?"

"It cannot be," replied the hermit; "because the life of your resolution would be but half an hour. It must not be, because the world has need of you.—Monarch! I am not wont to flatter; and you have many a gross and hideous fault about you; but, according to the common specimens of human kind, you are worthy to be King. It matters little to the world, whether you do good for its sake or your own. If your ambition bring about your fellow-creatures' welfare, your ambition is a virtue: nourish it. You have done good, O King! and you will do good; and therefore you must be King, till Heaven shall give you your dismissal. Nor did my reasoning tend, as you say, to make you quit the cares of the world; but only to make you justly estimate its joys, and look to a better immortality than that of earth—that empty dream of human vanity! Still you must bear the load of sovereignty you speak of; and, by freeing the people from the yoke of their thousand tyrants, accomplish the work you have begun. See you not that I, who have a better right to fly from the affairs of men, have come back from Auvergne at your call?"

"My good father," answered the King, "I would fain, as you say, take the yoke from the neck of the people; but I have not means. Even now, my finances are totally exhausted, and I sit upon my throne a beggar."

"Ha!" cried the hermit; "and therefore 'tis you seek me? I knew of this before. But say, are your exigencies so great as to touch the present, or only to menace the future?"

"'Tis present—too truly present, my want!" replied Philip. "Said I not, I am a beggar? Can a king say more?"

"This must be remedied!" said the hermit.—"Come into my cell, good son. Strange! that the ascetic's frock should prove richer than the monarch's gown!—but 'tis so!"

Philip followed the hermit into the rude thatched hut, on the cold earthen floor of which was laid the anchorite's bed of straw. It had no other furniture whatever. The mud walls were bare and rough. The window was but an opening to the free air of heaven; and the thatch seemed scarcely sufficient to keep off the inclemency of the weather. The King glanced his eye round the miserable dwelling, and then to the ashy and withered cheek of the hermit, as if he would have asked, "Is it possible for humanity to bear such privations?"

The anchorite remarked his look, and pointing to a crucifix of ebony hanging against the wall, "There," cried he, "is my reward!—there is the reward of fasting, and penitence, and prayer, and maceration, and all that has made this body the withered and blighted thing it is:—withered indeed! so that those who loved me best would not know a line in my countenance. But there is the reward!" And casting himself on his knees before the crucifix, he poured forth a long, wild, rhapsodical prayer, which indeed well accorded with the character of the times, but which was so very unlike the usual calm, rational, and even bitter manner of the anchorite, that Philip gazed on him, in doubt whether his judgment had not suddenly given way under the severity of his ascetic discipline.

At length the hermit rose, and, without noting the King's look of astonishment, turned abruptly from his address to Heaven, to far more mundane thoughts. Pushing back the straw and moss which formed his bed, from the spot where it joined the wall, he discovered, to the King's no small surprise, two large leathern sacks or bags, the citizen-like rotundity of which evinced their fulness in some kind.

"In each of those bags," said the hermit, "is the sum of one thousand marks of gold. One of them shall be yours, my son; the other is destined for another purpose."

It would be looking too curiously into the human heart to ask whether Philip, who, the moment before, would have thought one of the bags a most blessed relief from his very unkingly distresses, did not, on the sight of two, feel unsatisfied that one only was to be his portion. However, he was really of too noble a disposition not to feel thankful for the gift, even as it was; and he was proceeding gracefully to acknowledge his obligation to the hermit, when the old man stopped him.

"Vanity, vanity! my son," cried he. "What need of thanks, for giving you a thing that is valueless to me?—ay, more worthless than the moss amongst which it lies. My vow forbids me either to buy or sell, and though I may use gold, as the beast of burden bears it—but to transfer it to another,—to me, it is more worthless than the dust of the earth, for it neither bears the herbs that give me food, nor the leaves that form my bed. Send for it, Sir King, and it is yours.—But now, to speak of the future. I heard by the way that the Count de Tankerville is dead, and that the Duke of Burgundy claims all his broad lands. Is it so?"

"Nay," replied the King, "not so. The Count de Tankerville is wandering in the Holy Land. I have not heard of him since I went thither myself some ten years since: but he is there. At least, no tidings have reached me of his death. Even were he dead," continued the King, "which is not likely,—for he went but as one of the palmers, to whom, you know, the Soldan shows much favour; and he was a strong and vigorous man, fitted to resist all climates:—but even were he dead, the Duke of Burgundy has no claim upon his lands; for, before he went, he drew a charter and stamped it with his ring, whereby, in case of his death, he gives his whole and entire lands, with our royal consent, to Guy de Coucy, then a page warring with the men I left to Richard of England, but now a famous knight, who has done feats of great prowess in all parts of the world. The charter is in our royal treasury, sent by him to our safe keeping about ten years agone."

"Well, my son," replied the hermit, "the report goes that he is dead.—Now, follow my counsel. Lay your hand upon those lands; call in all the sums that for many years are due from all the Count's prévôts and sénéchals; employ the revenues in raising the dignity of your crown, repressing the wars and plunderings of your barons, and——"

"But," interrupted the King, "my good father, will not what you advise itself be plundering? Will it not be a notable injustice?"

"Are you one of those, Sir King," asked the hermit, "who come for advice, resolved to follow their own; and who hear the counsels of others, but to strengthen their own determination? Do as I tell you, and you shall prosper; and, by my faith in yon blessed emblem, I pledge myself that, if the Count de Tankerville be alive, I will meet his indignation; and he shall wreak his vengeance on my old head, if he agree not that the necessity of the case compelled you. If he be a good and loyal baron, he will not hesitate to say you did well, when his revenues were lying unemployed, or only fattening his idle servants. If he be dead, on the other hand, this mad-brained De Coucy, who owes me his life, shall willingly acquit you of the sums you have taken."

The temptation was too strong for the King to resist; and determining inwardly, merely to employ the large revenues of the Count de Tankerville for the exigencies of the state, and to repay them, if he or De Coucy did not willingly acquiesce in the necessity of the case,—without, however, remembering that repayment might not be in his power,—Philip Augustus consented to what the hermit proposed. It was also farther agreed between them, that in case of the young knight presenting himself at court, the question of his rights should be avoided, till such time as the death of the Count de Tankerville was positively ascertained; while, as some compensation, Philip resolved to give him, in case of war, the leading of all the knights and soldiers furnished by the lands which would ultimately fall to him.

The hermit was arranging all these matters with Philip, with as much worldly policy as if he never dreamed of nobler themes, when they were startled by the sound of a horn, which, though at some distance, was evidently in the forest. It seemed the blast of a huntsman; and a flush of indignation came over the countenance of the King, at the very thought of any one daring to hunt in one of the royal forests, almost within sight of the walls of Paris.

The hermit saw the angry spot, and giving way to the cynicism which mingled so strangely with many very opposite qualities in his character—"O God!" cried he, "what strange creatures thou hast made us! That a great, wise King should hold the right of slaughtering unoffending beasts as one of the best privileges of his crown!—to be sole and exclusive butcher of God's forests in France! I tell thee, Monarch, that when those velvet brutes, that fly panting at thy very tread heard afar, come and lick my hand, because I feed them and hurt them not, I hold my staff as much above thy sceptre, as doing good is above doing evil! But hie thee away quick, and send thy men to search the forest; for, hark! the saucy fool blows his horn again, and knows not royal ears are listening to his tell-tale notes!"

Philip was offended: but the vast reputation for sanctity which the hermit had acquired; the fasts, the vigils, and the privations, which he himself knew to be unfeigned,—had, in that age of superstition, no small effect even upon the mind of Philip Augustus:—he submitted, therefore, to the anchorite's rebuke with seeming patience, but taking care not to reply upon a subject whereon he knew himself to be peculiarly susceptible, and which might urge him into anger, he took leave of the hermit, fully resolved to follow his advice so far as to send out some of his men-at-arms, to see who was bold enough to hunt in the royal chase.

This trouble, however, was spared him; for, as he walked back, with a rapid pace, along the path that conducted to Vincennes, the sound of the horn came nearer and nearer; and suddenly the King was startled by an apparition in one of the glades, which was very difficult to comprehend. It consisted of a strong grey mare, galloping at full speed, with no apparent rider, but with two human legs, clothed in crimson silk, sticking far out before, one on each side of the animal's neck. As it approached, Philip perceived the body of the horseman, lying flat on his back, with his head resting on the saddle; and, not at all discomposed by his strange position, nor the quick pace of his steed, he was blowing all sorts of mots upon his horn, which was, in truth, the sound that had disturbed the monarch in his conference with the Hermit.

We must still remember, that the profound superstition of that age held, as a part of the true faith, the frequent appearance, in corporeal shape, of all sorts of spirits. It was also the peculiar province of huntsmen, and other persons frequenting large forests, to meet with these spirits; so that not a wood in France, of any extent, but had its appropriate fiend; and never did a chase terminate without some of the hunters separating from the rest, and having some evil communication of the kind with the peculiar demon of the place.

Now, though the reader may have before met with the personage who, in the present case, approached the King at full gallop, yet as Philip Augustus had never done so, and as no mind, however strong, is ever without some touch of the spirit of its age, it was not unnatural for the monarch to lay his hand upon his sword, that being the only infallible way he had ever discovered of exorcising all kinds of spirits whatever. The mare, however, aware that she was in the presence of something more awful than trees and rocks, suddenly stopped, and, in a moment, our friend Gallon the Fool sat bolt upright before the King, with his long and extraordinary nose wriggling in all sorts of ways on the blank flat of his countenance, as if it were the only part of his face that was surprised.

"Who the devil are you?" exclaimed the Monarch; "and what do you, sounding your horn in this forest?"

"I, the devil, am nobody," replied the jongleur; "and if you ask what I do here, I am losing my way as hard as I can—Haw, haw!"

"Nobody! How mean you?" demanded Philip. "You cannot be nobody."

"Yes, I am," answered the juggler. "I have often heard the sage Count Thibalt d'Auvergne say to my master, the valiant Sir Guy de Coucy, that the intellect is the man. Now, I lack intellect; and therefore am I nobody.—Haw, haw! Haw, haw!"

"So thou art but a buffoon," said the King.

"No, not so either," replied Gallon. "I am, indeed, Sir Guy de Coucy's tame juggler; running wild in this forest, for want of instruction."

"And where is now Sir Guy de Coucy," demanded the King, "and the Count Thibalt d'Auvergne you speak of? They were both in the Holy Land when last I heard of them."

"As for the Count d'Auvergne," replied Gallon the Fool,—"he parted from us three days since to go to Paris, to make love to the King's wife, who, they say, has a pretty foot. God help me!"

"Ha, villain!" cried the King. "'Tis well the King hears you not, or your ears would be slit!"

"So should his hearing spoil my hearing," cried the juggler; "but I would keep my ears out of his way. I have practice enough, in saving them from my Lord Sir Guy; but no man has reached them yet, and shall not.—Haw, haw!"

"And where is Sir Guy?" demanded the King. "How happen you to have parted from him?"

"He is but now sitting a mile hence, singing very doleful ballads under an oak," replied the juggler. "All about the old man and his daughter.—Haw, haw! Sir Julian of the Mount and the fair Isadore.—Haw, haw, haw!—You know?"

"No, 'faith, fool! I know not," replied Philip. "What do you mean?"

"Why, have you not heard," said the juggler, "how my good lord and my better self, and five or six varlets and squires, conducted old Sir Julian and the young Lady Isadore all the way from Vic le Comte to Senlis—and how we lost our way in this cursed forest—and how my lord sent me to seek it? Oh, 'tis a fine tale, and my lord will write it in verse—Haw, haw, haw!—and sing it to an old rattling harp; and make all the folks weep to hear how he has sworn treason against the King, all for the sake of the Lady Isadore.—Haw, haw, haw! Haw, haw!" And placing his hand against his cheek, the juggler poured forth a mixture of all sorts of noises, in which that of sharpening a saw was alone predominant.

Philip called, and intreated, and commanded him to cease, and to tell him more; but the malicious juggler only burst out into one of his long shrill laughs, and throwing himself back on his horse, set it off into a gallop, without at all asking his way; at the same time putting the horn to his mouth, and blowing a blast quite sufficient to drown all the Monarch's objurgations.

Philip turned upon his heel, and pursued his way to Vincennes, and—oh, strange human nature!—though he saw that his informant was a fool—though he easily guessed him to be a malicious one, he repeated again and again the words that Gallon had used—"Gone to make love to the King's wife!—sworn treason against the King!—But the man is a fool—an idiot," added the Monarch. "'Tis not worth a thought;" and yet Philip thought of it.

CHAPTER X.

In the days we speak of, the city of Paris was just beginning to venture beyond the island, and spread its streets and houses over the country around. During the reign of Louis the Seventh, and especially under the administration of Suger, Abbot of St. Denis, the buildings had extended far on the northern bank of the river; and there, already might be seen, churches and covered market-places, and all that indicates a wealthy and rising city; but in the midst of this suburb, nearly on the spot where stand at present the Rue Neuve and the Rue des Petits Champs, was a vast open space of ground, called the Champeaux, or Little Fields; which, appertaining to the crown, had been reserved for the chivalrous sports of the day. Part of it, indeed, had been given to the halls of Paris, and part had been enclosed as a cemetery; but a large vacant space still remained, and here was appointed the tournament of July, to which Philip Augustus had called all the chivalry of his realm.

It is not my intention here to describe a tournament, which has been so often done—and so exquisitely well done in the beautiful romance of Ivanhoe, that my relation would not only have the tediousness of a twice-told tale, but the disadvantage of a comparison with something far better; but I am unfortunately obliged to touch upon such a theme; as the events that took place at the *passe d'armes* of Champeaux materially affect the course of my history.

On one side of the plain extended a battlemented building, erected by the minister Guerin, and dedicated, as the term went, to the shelter of the poor passengers. It looked more like a fortress, indeed, than a house of hospitality, being composed entirely of towers and turrets; and as it was the most prominent edifice in the neighbourhood, it was appointed for the display of the casques and shields of arms belonging to the various knights who proposed to combat in the approaching tournament. Nor was the effect unpleasant to the eye, for every window on that side of the building which fronted the field, had the shield and banner of some particular knight, with all the same gay colours wherewith we now decorate the panels of our carriages. In the cloisters below, from morning unto night-fall, stood one of the heralds in his glittering tabard, with his pursuivants and followers, ready to receive and register complaints against any of the knights whose arms were displayed above, and who, in case of any serious charges, were either prevented from entering, or were driven with ignominy from, the lists.

Side by side, on one of the most conspicuous spots of the building, as warriors of high fame and prowess, were placed the shields and banners of Count Thibalt d'Auvergne and Guy de Coucy; and the officers of arms, who, from time to time repeated the names of the various knights, and their exploits and qualities, did not fail to pause long upon the two brothers in arms; giving De Coucy the meed over all others for valour and daring, and D'Auvergne for cool courage and prudent skill.

All the arrangements of the field were as magnificent as if the royal coffers had overflowed. The scaffoldings for the king, the ladies, and the judges, were hung with crimson and gold; the tents and booths were fluttering with streamers of all colours, and nothing was seen around but pageant and splendour.

Such was the scene which presented itself on the evening before the tournament, when De Coucy and his friend, the Count d'Auvergne, whom he had rejoined by this time in Paris, set out, from a lodging which they occupied near the tower of the châtelet, to visit the spot where they were to display their skill the next day. A circumstance, however, occurred by the way, which it may be well to record.

Passing through some of the more narrow and tortuous streets of Paris, and their horses pressed on by the crowd of foot passengers, who were coming from, or going to, the same gay scene as themselves, they could only converse in broken observations to each other, as they for a moment came side by side. Even these detached sentences were often drowned in the various screaming invitations to spend their money, which were in that day poured forth upon passengers of all denominations.

"Methinks the King received us but coldly," said De Coucy, as he gained D'Auvergne's ear for a moment, "after making us wait four days too!—His hospitality seemingly runs dry."

"Wine, will you wine? Good strong wine, fit for knights and nobles," cried a loud voice at the door of one of the houses.

"Cresses!—fresh water-cresses!" shrieked a woman, with a basket in her hand.

"The King can scarce love me less than I love him," answered the Count, in a low tone, as a movement of his horse brought him close to De Coucy.

"And yet," said his friend, in some surprise, "you, principally, determined your father to reject all overtures, from the Count of Flanders, brought by Sir Julian of the Mount!"

"Because I admire the King, though I love not the man," replied Count Thibalt.

"Baths! baths! hot baths!" cried a man with a napkin over his arm, and down whose face the perspiration was streaming. "Hot! hot! hot! upon my honour!—Bathe, lords and knights! bathe! 'Tis dusty weather."

"Knight of Auvergne!" cried a voice close by; "those that soar high, fall farthest. Sir Guy de Coucy, the falcon was slain that checked at the eagle, because he was the king of birds."

A flush came into the cheek of Count Thibalt; and De Coucy started and turned round in his saddle, to see who spoke. No one, however, was near, but a man engaged in that ancient and honourable occupation of selling hot pies, and a woman chaffering for a pair of doves with another of her own sex.

"By all the saints of France!" cried De Coucy, "some one named us. What meant the fool by checking at the eagle? I see him not, or I would check at him!"

Count Thibalt d'Auvergne asked no explanation of the quaint proverb that had been addressed to him; but only inquired of De Coucy, whether 'twas not like the voice of his villain—Gallon the Fool.

"No!" replied the knight.—"No! 'twas not so shrill. Besides, he is gone, as he said, to inspect the lists some half-hour ago."

In truth, no sooner did they approach the booths, which had been erected by various hucksters and jugglers, at the end of the cemetery of the Innocents, a short distance from the lists, than they beheld Gallon the Fool, with his jerkin turned inside out, amusing a crowd of men, women, and children, with various tricks of his old trade.

"Come to me!—come to me!" cried he, "all that want to learn philosophy! I am the king of cats, and the patron of cock-sparrows. Have any of you a dog that wants gloves, or a goat that lacks a bonnet? Bring him me!—bring him me! and I will fit him to a hair.—Haw, haw! haw, haw!"

His strange laugh, his still stranger face, and his great dexterity, were giving much delight and astonishment to the people, when the appearance of De Coucy, who, he well knew, would be angry at the public exhibition of his powers, put a stop to his farther feats; and shouting, "Haw, haw! haw, haw!" he scampered off, and was safely at home before them.

The day of the tournament broke clear and bright; and long before the hour appointed, the galleries were full, and the knights armed in their tents. Nothing was waited for but the presence of the King; and many was the impatient look of lady and of page, towards the street which led to the side of the river.

At length the sound of trumpets announced his approach; and, winding up towards Champeaux, were seen the leaders of his body-guard—that first small seed from which sprung and branched out in a thousand directions the great body of a standing army. The first institution of these serjeants of arms, as they were called, took place during Philip's crusade in the Holy Land, where, feigning, or believing, his life to be in danger from the poniards of the assassins, he attached to his own person a guard of twelve hundred men, whose sole duty was to watch around the king's dwelling. In France, though the same excuse no longer existed, Philip was too wise to dismiss the corps which he had once established, and which not only offered a nucleus for larger bodies in time of need, but which obtained, by a display of pomp and majesty, that reverence for the name of king, that neither the extent of the royal domains, nor the prerogatives of sovereignty, limited as they were in those days, could alone either require or enforce.

Slowly winding up through the streets towards the Champeaux, the cavalcade of royalty seemed to delight in exhibiting itself to the gaze of the people, who crowded the houses to the very tops; for, well understanding the barbarous taste of the age in which he lived, no one ever more feasted the public eye with splendour than Philip Augustus.

First came the heralds two and two, with their many-coloured tabards, exhibiting on their breasts the arms of their provinces. Next followed on horseback, Mountjoy king-at-arms, surrounded by a crowd of marshals, pursuivants, and valets on foot. He was dressed in a sleeveless tunic of crimson, which, opening in front, displayed a robe of violet velvet, embroidered with *fleur de lis.* On his head was placed his crown, and in his hand a sort of staff or sceptre. He was indeed, as far as personal appearance went, a very kingly person; and being a great favourite amongst the people, he was received with loud shouts of Denis Mountjoy! Denis Mountjoy! Blessings on thee, Sire François de Roussy!

Next appeared a party of the serjeants-at-arms, bearing their gilded quivers and long bows; while each held in his right hand the baton of his immense brazen mace, the head or ball of which rested on his shoulder. But then came a sight which obliterated all others. It was the party of the King and Queen. The monarch himself was mounted on a *destrier*, or battle horse, as black as night, whose every step seemed full of the consciousness that he bore royalty. Armed completely, except the casque, which was borne behind him by a page, Philip Augustus moved the warrior, and looked the monarch; and the same man who had heard the hermit's rebuke with patience, ordered the preparations of a banquet like a Lucullus, and played with the roses in a woman's hair, now looked as if he could have crushed an empire with a frown.

Beside him, on a palfrey—as if for the contrast's sake, milk-white—rode the lovely Agnes de Meranie. All that is known of her dress is, that it also was white; for it seems that no one who looked on her could remark anything but her radiant beauty. As she moved on, managing with perfect ease a high-spirited horse, whose light movements served but to call out a thousand graces in his rider, the glitter, and the pageant, and the splendour seemed to pass away from the eyes of the multitude, extinguished by something brighter still; and, ever and anon, Philip Augustus himself let his glance drop to the sweet countenance of his queen, with an expression that woke some sympathetic feeling in the bosoms of the people; and a loud shout proclaimed the participation of the crowd in the sensations of the King.

Behind the King and Queen rode a long train of barons and ladies, with all the luxury of dress and equipage for which that age was distinguished. Amongst the most conspicuous of that noble train were Constance, Duchess of Brittany, and her son Arthur Plantagenet, of whose character and fate we shall have more to speak hereafter. Each great chieftain was accompanied by many a knight, and vassal, and vavassour, with worlds of wealth bestowed upon their horses and their persons. Following these again, came another large body of the monarch's men-at-arms, closing the procession, which marched slowly on, and entered the southern end of the lists; after which, traversing the field amidst the shouts and gratulations of the multitude, the whole party halted at the foot of a flight of steps leading to the splendid gallery prepared for the King and Queen. Here, surrounded by a crowd of waving crests and glittering arms, Philip himself lifted Agnes from her horse, and led her to her seat; while at the same time the trumpet sounded for the various knights to make a tour round the field, before proceeding to the sports of the day. Each, as he passed by the royal gallery, saluted the King and Queen by dropping the point of his lance; and from time to time, Agnes demanded the name of the different knights, whom either she did not know, or whose faces were so concealed by the helmet as to render it difficult to distinguish them.

"Who is he, Philip?" demanded she, as one of the knights passed, "he with the wivern in his casque, and the red scarf,—who is he? He sits his horse nobly."

"'Tis Charles de Tournon," replied the King; "a noble knight, called the Comte Rouge. Here comes also Guillaume de Macon, my fair dame," added the King, smiling, "with a rose on his shield, all for your love."

"Silly knight!" said Agnes. "He had better fix his love where he may hope to win. But who is this next, with the shield sinople, bearing a cross, gules, and three towers in chief?"

"That is the famous Guy de Coucy," replied the King; "a most renowned knight. If report speaks true, we shall see all go down before his lance. And this who follows, and is now coming up, is the no less famous Thibalt, Count d'Auvergne"—and the King fixed his eyes upon his wife with a keen, inquiring glance.

Luckily, however, the countenance of Agnes showed nothing which could alarm a mind like Philip's.

"Count Thibalt d'Auvergne!" cried she, with a frank, unembarrassed smile. "Oh! I know him well. He spent many months at my father's court in going to the Holy Land. From him I first heard the praises of my Philip, long, long ere I ever entertained a hope of being his wife. I was scarce more than a child then, not much above fifteen—and yet I forgot not those praises. He was a dear friend too—that Count d'Auvergne—of my poor brother Alberic, who died in Palestine." The Queen added, with a sigh—"Poor Alberic! he loved me well!"

"The fool lied!" said Philip, internally: "all is frank and fair. The fool lied!—and led me to slight a noble knight and powerful baron by his falsehood!" And bending forward, as if to do away the coolness with which he had at first treated the Count d'Auvergne, he answered his salute with a marked and graceful inclination of the head.

"Is it possible?" cried Agnes, after the Count had passed. "In truth, I should never have known him, Philip, he is so changed. Why, when he was at the court of Istria, he was a fresh young man; and now he is as deadly pale and wan as one sick of the plague. Oh, what a horrible place must be that Holy Land!—Promise me, Philip, on all the Evangelists, never to go there again, let who will preach new crusades:—nay, promise me, my lord!"

"I do! I do! sweet Agnes!" replied the King: "once in a life is quite enough. I have other warfares now before me."

After the knights had all passed, a short space of time intervened for the various arrangements of the field; and then, the barriers being opened, the tournament really commenced. Into the particulars of the feats performed, as I have already said, I shall not enter; suffice it that, as the King had predicted, all went down before De Coucy's lance; and that Count Thibalt d'Auvergne, though not hurried on by the same quick spirit, was judged, by the old knights, no way inferior to his friend, though his valour bore a different character. The second course had taken place, and left the same result; and many of the fair dames in the galleries began to regret that neither of the two companions in arms had been decorated with their colours, and determined upon various little arts and wiles, to engage one or other of the two crusaders to bear some mark of theirs in any subsequent tournament.

Thus stood the day, when the voices of the heralds cried a pause, much to the astonishment, not only of the combatants, but of the King himself. The barriers opened, and, preceded by a stout priest bearing a pontifical cross in silver, the Cardinal of St. Mary, dressed as *Legate à latere,* entered the lists, followed by a long train of ecclesiastics.*

A quick, angry flush mounted into the King's cheek, and his brow knit into a frown, which sufficiently indicated that he expected no very agreeable news from the visit of the legate. The Cardinal, however, without being moved by his frowns, advanced directly towards the gallery in which he sat, and, placing himself before him, addressed him thus:—

"Philip, King of France, I, the Cardinal of St. Mary's, am charged, and commanded, by our most holy father, the Pope Innocent, to speak to you thus——"

"Hold, Sir Cardinal!" cried the King; "let your communication be for our private ear. We are not accustomed to receive either ambassadors or legates in the listed field."

"I have been directed, Sir King," replied the legate, "by the superior orders of his holiness, thus publicly to admonish you, wherever I should find you: you having turned a deaf and contemptuous ear to the frequent counsels and commands of the holy church. Know then, King Philip, that with surprise and grief that a king of France should so forget the hereditary piety of his race, his holiness perceives that you still persist in abandoning your lawful wife, Ingerburge of Denmark!"

"The man will drive me mad!" exclaimed the King, grasping his truncheon, as if he would have hurled it at the daring churchman, who thus insulted him before all the barons of his realm. "Will no one stay him?"

Several of the knights and heralds advanced to interpose between the legate and the king; but the Cardinal waved them back; and, well knowing that their superstitious veneration for his habit would prevent them from silencing him by force, he proceeded boldly with his speech.

"Perceiving also," continued he, "that, taking advantage of an unlawful and annulled divorce, weakly pronounced by your bishops, you have taken to your bed another woman, who is not, and cannot be, your wife!"

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* It will be understood that this sudden appearance of the legate is an historical fact.

A shriek from the women of the Queen here interrupted the harangue of the prelate, and all eyes instantly turned upon her.

Simple surprise and astonishment had been the first emotion of Agnes de Meranie, at seeing any one bold enough to oppose a will that, according to all her ideas, was resistless; but, gradually, as she began to comprehend the scope of the legate's discourse, terror and distress took possession of her whole frame. Her eyes strained on him, as on some bad angel come to cross her young happiness; her lip quivered; the warm glow of her cheek waxed faint and pale, like the sunshine fading away from the evening sky; and, at the last terrible words that seemed to seal her fate for ever, she fell back senseless into the arms of her women.

The scene of confusion that ensued is not to be described.

"By the light of heaven, old man!" exclaimed Philip, "were it not for thy grey hairs, I would strike thee dead!—Away with him! Let him speak no more!—Men-at-arms! put him forth from the lists! Away with him!—Agnes, my beloved!" he cried, turning to the Queen, and taking her small hand in his, "awake, awake! Fear not, dear Agnes! Is your Philip's love so light as to be shaken by the impotent words of any churchman in Christendom?"

In the meanwhile, the serjeants-at-arms hurried the prelate and his followers from the lists, amidst many a bitter taunt from the minstrels and trouvères, who feared not even then to attack with the most daring satire the vices of the church of Rome. The ladies of Agnes de Meranie pressed round their fair mistress, sprinkling her with all kinds of essences and perfumed waters; some chattering, some still screaming, and all abusing the daring legate, who had so pained the heart of their lovely queen, and put a stop to the sports of the day. The knights and barons, all united in the cause of the princess by every motive that had power in the days of chivalry—youth, beauty, innocence, and distress, shouted loudly, that they acknowledged her for their sovereign, the queen of all queens, and the flower of all ladies!

Philip Augustus, with royal indignation still upon his brow, caught gladly at the enthusiasm of his chivalry; and, standing forward in the front of the gallery, with the inanimate hand of his lovely wife in his left, and pointing to her death-like cheek with the other, he exclaimed, in a voice that passed all over the field—"Knights and nobles of fair France! shall I suffer my hearth to be invaded by the caprice of any proud prelate? Shall I yield the lady of my love for the menace of any pope on earth? You good knights!—you only can judge! and, by Heaven's throne! you only shall be the judges!"

"Life to the King!—life to the King! Denis Mountjoy!—Denis Mountjoy!" shouted the barons, as if they were rallying round the royal standard on the battle field; and, at the same time, the waving of a thousand scarfs, and handkerchiefs, and veils, from the galleries around, announced how deep an interest the ladies of France took in a question where the invaded rights of the Queen came so home to the bosoms of all.

"Break up the sports for to-day!" cried Philip, waving his warder. "This has disturbed our happiness for the moment; but we trust our fair Queen will be able to thank her loyal knights by the hour of four, when we invite all men of noble birth here present to sup with us in our great hall of the palace. For those who come too late to find a seat in the great hall, a banquet shall be prepared in the tower of the Louvre. Till then, farewell!"

The fainting-fit of Agnes de Meranie lasted so long, that it was found necessary to carry her to the palace in a litter, followed, sadly and in silence, by the same splendid train which had conducted her, as if in triumph, to the tournament.

In the mean while, for a short time, the knights who had come to show their prowess and skill, and those noble persons, both ladies and barons, who had graced the lists as spectators, remained in groups, scattered over the field, and through the galleries, canvassing vehemently what had taken place; and not the most priest-ridden of them all, did not, in the first excitement of the moment, declare that the conduct of both pope and cardinal was daring and scandalous, and that the divorce which had been pronounced between Philip and Ingerburge by the bishops of France ought to hold good in the eyes of all Frenchmen.

"Now, by the good Heaven!" cried De Coucy, raising his voice above all the rest, "she is as fair a queen as ever my eyes rested on; and though I cannot wear her colours, and proclaim her the star of my love, because another vow withholds me, yet I will mortally defy any man who says she is not lawfully Queen of France.—Sound, trumpets, sound! and you heralds, cry—Here stands Guy de Coucy in arms, ready to prove upon the bodies of any persons who do deny that Agnes Princess de Meranie is lawful Queen of France, and wife of Philip the Magnanimous, that they are false and recreant, and to give them the lie in their throat, wagering against them his body and arms in battle, when and where they will appoint, on horseback or on foot, and giving them the choice of arms!"

The trumpets sounded, and the heralds who remained on the field proclaimed the challenge of the knight: while De Coucy cast his gauntlet on the ground. A moment's profound silence succeeded, and then a loud shout. No one answering his call, De Coucy bade the heralds take up the glove and nail it on some public place with his challenge written beneath; for payment of which service, he twisted off three links of a massive gold chain round his neck, and cast it to the herald who raised his glove; after which he turned, and, rejoining the Count d'Auvergne, rode back to throw off his arms and prepare for the banquet to which they had been invited.

"De Coucy," said D'Auvergne, as they passed onward, "I too would willingly have joined in your challenge, had I thought that our lances could ever establish Agnes de Meranie as Queen of France; but I tell you no, De Coucy! If the pope be firm, and firm he will be, as her father too well knows, Philip will be forced to resign her, or to trust to his barons for support against the church."

"Well!" cried De Coucy, "and his barons will support him. Saw you not how, but now, they pledged themselves to his support?"

"The empty enthusiasm of a moment!" replied D'Auvergne, bitterly; "a flame which will be out as soon as kindled! Not one man in each hundred there, I tell thee, De Coucy, has got one spark of such enthusiasm as yours, which, like the Greek fire, flashes brightly, yet burns for ever; and as few of them, the colder sort of determination, which, like mine, burns without any flame, till all that fed it is consumed."

De Coucy paused. For a moment the idea crossed his mind of proposing to D'Auvergne a plan for binding all the barons present by a vow to support Philip against the church of Rome, while the enthusiasm was yet upon them; but though brave almost to madness where his own person was alone concerned, he was prudent and cautious in no small degree, where the life and happiness of others were involved: and, remembering the strife to which such a proposal, even, might give rise, he paused, and let it die in silence.

CHAPTER XI.

The banquet passed, like the scene which followed the tournament, in enthusiastic assertions of the fair Queen's rights, although she was not present. In this instance, Philip Augustus, all clear-sighted as he was, suffered himself to be deceived by his wishes; and believed fully that his barons would aid him in the resistance he meditated to the usurped authority of the pope.

The promises, however, which wine and wassail, and festivity call forth, are scarcely more lasting than the feast itself; and, without we can take advantage of the enthusiasm before it dies, and render it irrevocable by urging it into action, little can ever be gained from any sudden emotion of a multitude. If Philip doubted its durability, he did not suffer the shade of such a doubt to appear. The vaunt of every young knight he thanked as a promise; and every expression of admiration and sympathy, directed towards his queen, he affected to look upon as a pledge to espouse her cause.

The Count Thibalt d'Auvergne was the only one who made neither boasts nor promises; and yet the King—whether judging his mind of a more stable fabric than the others, or wishing to counterbalance the coldness he had shown him on his first appearance at the court,—now loaded him with honours, placed him near him, spoke to him on all those subjects on which he deemed the Count was best calculated to speak; and affecting to consider his advice and assistance of great import in arranging the relations to be established between the crown of France and the new French colony, which had taken Constantinople, he prayed him to accompany the court to Compiègne, for which place it set out the next day.

The King's favour and notice fell upon the calm cold brow and dark thoughtful eye of Thibalt d'Auvergne like sunshine in winter, melting in no degree the frozen surface that it touched. The invitation, however, he accepted; saying, in the same unmoved tone, that he was anxious to see the Queen, whom he had known in years long gone, and to whom he could give fresh news from Istria, with many a loving greeting from her father, whom he had seen as he returned from Palestine.

The Queen, Philip replied, would be delighted to see him, and to hear all that he had to tell; for she had never yet forgot her own fair country—nay, nor let that canker-worm of affection, absence, eat the least bit away of her regard for those she loved.

The very first, Count Thibalt took his leave and departed. De Coucy rose, and was following; but the King detained him for a moment, to thank him for the generous interest he had shown in his Queen's rights, which had not failed to reach his ears. He then asked, with a slight shade of concern upon his brow, "Is your companion in arms, beau sire, always so sad? It grieves me truly, to see him look so possessed by sorrow! What is the cause thereof?"

"By my faith! my lord, 'tis love, I believe," replied De Coucy; "some fair dame of Palestine — I wot not whether heathen or Christian, rightly; but all I know is this: — Some five years ago, when he first joined us, then warring near Tyre, he was as cheerful a knight as ever unhorsed a Saracen; never very lively in his mirth, yet loving gaiety in others, and smiling often: when suddenly, about two or three years after, he lost all his cheerfulness, abandoned his smiles, grew wan and thin, and has ever since been the man you see him."

The shade passed away from the King's brow; and saying, "'Tis a sad pity! We will try to find some bright eyes in France that may cure this evil love," he suffered De Coucy to depart.

All that passed, relative to the reception of the legate, was faithfully transmitted to Pope Innocent III.; and the very enthusiasm shown by the barons of France in the cause of their lovely Queen, made the pontiff tremble for his authority. The immense increase of power which the Bishops of Rome had acquired by the victory their incessant and indefatigable intrigues had won, even over the spirit of Frederick Barbarossa, wanted yet the stability of antiquity; and it was on this account that Innocent III. dreaded so much that Philip might successfully resist the domination of the church, even in one single instance.

There were other motives, however, which, in the course of the contest about to be here recorded, mingled with his conduct a degree of personal acrimony towards the King of France. Of an imperious and jealous nature, the pontiff met with resistance first from Philip Augustus, and his ambition came only in aid of his anger. The election of the Emperor of Germany was one cause of difference ; Philip Augustus supporting with all his power Philip of Suabia ; and the pope not only supporting, but crowning with his own hands, Otho, nephew of John, King of England,—although great doubts existed in regard to his legitimate election.

As keen and clear-sighted as he was ambitious, Innocent saw that in Philip Augustus he had an adversary as intent upon increasing his own authority, as he himself could be upon extending the power of the church. He saw the exact point of opposition ; he saw the powerful mind and political strength of his antagonist ; but he saw also that Philip's power, when acting against his own, must greatly depend upon the progress of the human mind towards a more enlightened state, which advance must necessarily be slow and difficult ; while the foundations of his own power had been laid by ages of superstition, and were strengthened by all those habits and ceremonies to which the heart of man clings in every state, but more especially in a state of darkness.

Resolved at once to strike the blow, it happened favourably for the views of the pope, that the first question where his authority was really compromised, was one in which the strongest passions of his adversary were engaged, while his own mind was free to direct its energies by the calm rule of judgment. It is but justice also to say, that though Innocent felt the rejection of his interference as an insult, and beheld the authority of the church despised with no small wrath, yet all his actions and his letters, though firm and decided, were calm and temperate. Still, he menaced not without having resolved to strike ; and the only answer he returned to the request of the Cardinal of St. Mary's for farther instructions, was an order to call a council of the bishops of France, for the purpose of excommunicating Philip as rebel to the will of the church, and of fulminating an interdict against the whole of the realm. So severe a sentence, however, alarmed the bishops of France; and, at their intercession, the legate delayed for a time its execution, in hopes that by some concession Philip might turn away the wrath of the church.

In the meanwhile, as if the blow with which he was menaced but made him cling more closely to the object for whose sake he exposed himself, Philip devoted himself entirely to divert the mind of Agnes de Meranie from contemplating the fatal truth which she had learned at last. He now called to her remembrance the enthusiasm with which his barons had espoused her cause; he pointed out to her that the whole united bishops of France had solemnly pronounced the dissolution of his incomplete marriage with the Princess of Denmark; and he assured her, that were it but to protect the rights of his clergy and his kingdom from the grasping ambition of the See of Rome, he would resist its interference, and maintain his independence with the last drop of his blood.

At other times he strove to win her away even from the recollection of her situation; and he himself seemed almost to forget the monarch in the husband. Sometimes it was in the forests of Compiègne, Senlis, or Fontainbleau, chasing the stag or the boar, and listening to the music of the hounds, the ringing horns, and the echoing woods. Sometimes it was in the banquet and the pageant, the tournament or the *cour plenière*, with all its crowd, and gaiety, and song. Sometimes it was in solitude and tranquillity, straying together through lovely scenes, where nature seemed but to shine back the sweet feelings of their hearts; and every tone of all summer's gladness seemed to find an echo in their bosoms.

Philip succeeded; and Agnes de Meranie, though her cheek still remained a shade paler than it had been, and her soft eyes had acquired a look of pensive languor, had—or seemed to have—forgotten that there was a soul on earth who disputed her title to the heart of her husband, and the crown of her realm. She would laugh, and converse, and sing, and frame gay dreams of joy and happiness to come, as had been ever her wont; but it was observed that she would start, and turn pale, when any one came upon her suddenly, as if she still feared evil news; and, if any thing diverted her thoughts from the gay current in which she strove to guide them, she would fall into a long reverie, from which it was difficult to wake her.

Thus had passed the time of Philip Augustus and Agnes de Meranie, from their departure for Compiègne, the day after the tournament. The hours of Count Thibalt d'Auvergne, however, had been spent in a very different manner from that which he had anticipated. He had, it is true, made up his mind to a painful duty; but it was a duty of another kind he was called to perform. As his foot was in the stirrup to join the royal cavalcade, for the purpose of proceeding to Compiègne, according to the King's invitation, a messenger arrived from Auvergne, bearing the sad news that his father had been suddenly seized with an illness, from which no hope existed of his recovery; and D'Auvergne, without loss of time, turned his steps towards Vic le Comte.

On his arrival, he found his parent still lingering on the confines between those two strange worlds, the present and the future: the one which we pass through, as in a dream, without knowing the realities of anything around us; the other, the dreadful inevitability of which we are found to clothe in a thousand splendid hopes, putting, as it were, a crown of glory on the cold and grimly brow of Death.

'Twas a sad task to watch the flickering of life's lamp, till the flame flew off for ever! The Count d'Auvergne, however, performed it firmly; and having laid the ashes of his father in the earth, he stayed but to receive the homage of his new vassals, and then turned his steps once more towards Paris, leaving the government of Auvergne to his uncle, the famous Count Guy, celebrated both for his jovial humour and his predatory habits.

CHAPTER XII.

We must now once more go back a little in our history, and return to Sir Guy de Coucy, who, on the morning of his friend's departure for Auvergne, stood at the door of their common dwelling to see him set out. In the hurry of such a moment there had been no time for many of those arrangements between the two friends, which the Count d'Auvergne much wished to have made. However, as he embraced De Coucy at parting, according to the custom of the day, he whispered in his ear: "The besants we brought from the Holy Land are in my chamber. If you love me, De Coucy, remember that we are brothers, and have all things in common. I shall find you here at my return. If I come not soon, I will send you a messenger." De Coucy nodded his head with a smile, and, leaning on his large two-handed sword, saw the Count d'Auvergne mount his horse and depart.

"Farewell, D'Auvergne!" said he, as he turned to re-enter the house,—"perhaps we may never meet again; but De Coucy forgets not thy generous kindness, though he will not use it. Our fortunes are far too unequal for us longer to hold a common purse."

Be it remarked, however, that the scruples which affected De Coucy on this occasion were rather singular in the age in which he lived; for the companionship of arms, which, in their romantic spirit, the knights of even a much later period often vowed to each other, were frequently of a stricter and more generous nature than any of our most solid engagements of life at present, involving not only community of fortune and of fate, but of friendships and enmities, of pleasures and pains, and sometimes of life or death.* When once two knights had exchanged arms, as was often the case, it became their duty to assist each other on every occasion, with body and goods, during the expedition in which they were engaged; and sometimes, even for life, to share all wealth between them, both present and to come; and in case of one dying, while under an engagement to do battle (or under a wager of battle, as it was called), his companion, or brother in arms, was bound to fill his place, and maintain his honour in the duel.

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* Ducange cites the following formula from a work I cannot meet with. The passage refers to a fraternity of arms between Majon, high admiral of Sicily, and the archbishop of Palermo.

"Dictum est præterea quod ii, juxta consuetudinem Siculorum, fraternæ fœdus societatis contraxerint, seseque invicem jurejurando astrinxerint ut alter alterum modis omnibus promoveret, et tam in prosperis quàm in adversis unius essent animi, unius voluntatis atque consilii; quisquis alterum læderet, amborum incurreret offensam."

The same learned author cites a declaration of Louis XI. where he constitutes Charles, Duke of Burgundy, his *sole* brother in arms, thereby seeming to imply that this adoption of a brother in arms was restricted to one.—*Ducange*, Dissert. xxi.

While in the Holy Land, cut off from frequent supplies, and in imminent and continual dangers, De Coucy had found no inequality between himself and Count Thibalt d'Auvergne; but now, placed amidst the ruinous expense of tournaments and courts, he resolved to break off at once an engagement, where no parity of means existed between himself and his companion.

Slowly, and somewhat sadly, De Coucy returned to his own chamber, feeling a touch of care which his light heart had not often known before. "Hugo de Barre," said he, "give me a flask of wine. I have not tasted my morning's cup, and I am melancholy."

"Shall I put some comfits in it, beau sire?" demanded the squire. "I have often known your worship get over a bad fit of love, by a ladle-full of comfits in a cup of Cyprus."

"As thou wilt, Hugo," answered the knight; "but 'tis not love I want to cure, now-a-day."

"Marry! I thought, Sire Guy," replied Hugo de Barre, "that it was all for love of the Lady Isadore; but then, again, I fancied it was strange, if you loved her, that you should leave her at Senlis, and not go on with her to her own castle, and strive to win her!"

"Her father was going to lodge with the Sire de Montmorency, my cousin Enguerand's sworn foe," replied De Coucy; "and even after that, he goes not home, but speeds to Rouen, to mouth it with John, King of England.—By my faith!" he added, speaking to himself, "that old man will turn out a rebel from simple folly. He must needs be meddling with treason, but to make himself important. Yet D'Auvergne says he was a good warrior in his day. I wish I could keep his fingers from the fire, were it but for his daughter's love—sweet girl!"

Had De Coucy been alone, he would probably have thought what he now said, yet would not have spoken it; but having begun by addressing his attendant, he went on aloud, though the latter part of what he said was, in reality, merely a part his commune with himself. Hugo de Barre, however, who had, on more than one occasion, been thus made, as it were, a speaking-block by his master, understood the process of De Coucy's mind, and stood silent till his lord had done.

"Then you do love the lady, beau sire?" said he at last, venturing more than he usually did upon such occasions.

"Well, well, Hugo! what is it to thee?" demanded De Coucy. "I will not keep thee out all night, as when I courted the Princess of Syracuse."

"Nay, but I love the Lady Isadore better than ever I did the Princess of Syracuse," replied the squire; "and I would stay out willingly many a night for her sake, so she would be my lord's true lady. Look ye, my lord! You have seen her wear this bracelet of cloth of gold," he continued, drawing forth a piece of fine linen, in which was wrapped a broad band of cloth of gold, not at all unlike the bracelets of gilded wire, lately so much the mode amongst the fair dames of London and Paris, "I asked one of her maidens to steal it for me."

"You did not, surely, Hugo!" cried De Coucy. "How dare you be so bold with any noble lady, sirrah?"

"Nay, then, I will give it back," replied the squire. "I had intended the theft to have profited your lordship; but I will give it back. The Lady Isadore, it is true, knew that her damsel took it; but still it was a theft; and I will give it back again. She knew, too, that it was I who asked it; and doubtless guessed it was you, beau sire, would have it; but I had better give it back."

"Nay, nay! good Hugo," replied De Coucy; "give it me. I knew not you were so skilful in such matters. I knew you were a good scout, but not in Sir Cupid's army.—Give it me!"

"Nay, beau sire, I had better give it back," replied the squire; "and then I will fall into my duty again, and look for nothing but routiers, cotereaux, and the like. But there is something more I wished to tell you, sir. Old Giles, the squire of the good Count Julian, told me, that if his lord keep his mind of going to Rouen, he must needs in three weeks' time pass within sight of our own—that is to say, your own—castle. Now, would it not be fair sport, to lay an ambush for the whole party, and take them prisoners, and bring them to the castle?"

"By my faith! it would," replied the knight. "But how is this, Hugo?—thou art a changed man. Ever since I have known thee, which is since I was not higher than my dagger, thou hast shown thyself as stiff and sturdy a piece of old iron, as any of the shields that hang by the wall; and now thou art craving bracelets, and laying ambushes for fair ladies, as if thou hadst been bred up in the very palace of Love. Methinks that same damsel, who stole the bracelet for thee, must have woke up some new spirit in thy heart of stone, to make thine outward man so pliable. Why, compared to what thou wert, Hugo, thou art as a deer-skin coat to a steel plastron. Art thou not in love, man? Answer me!"

"Something like it, I fear me, beau sire," replied the squire. "And as it is arranged between me and Alixe, that if you win the lady, I am to have the maid, we are resolved to set our wits to work to help your lordship on."

"By my life! a hopeful plot," replied De Coucy: "and well do I know, Hugo, that the maid's good word is often as much gained as the mistress's smile. But go, order to saddle; leave the bracelet with me; and as soon as the horses be ready, De Coucy will spur on for the home of his fathers."

The squire delivered the bracelet to his lord, and left the apartment; and no sooner was he gone, than De Coucy carried the bracelet to his lips, to his forehead, and his heart, with as much fervour of devotion, as ever monk showed for the most sacred relic of his church.

"She knew that her damsel took it!—she knew that it was for me!" exclaimed he, in an ecstasy of delight, which every one who can feel, may have felt on discovering some such unlooked-for source of happiness. Stretching out his hand, De Coucy then took up the rote, which, as a true trouvère, he made his inseparable companion. It was an age when poetry was a language—the real, not the figurative language of love—when song was in the heart of every one, ready to break forth the moment that passion or enthusiasm called for aid;—and, in the acmé of his gladness, the young knight sang to the instrument a ballad, composed, indeed, long before; but the concluding verse of which he altered to suit his feelings at the moment.

SONG.

I.

"I rode my battle-horse afar—
  A long, a long, and weary way;
Fading I saw night's latest star,
  And morning's prime, and risen day,
    But still the desert around me lay.

II.

On, on, o'er burning sands I rode,
  Beneath a red and angry sky;
Burning, the air around me glowed;
  My tongue was parch'd, my lip was dry:—
Worlds were not worth the west-wind's sigh.

III.

With fever'd blood, and fiery eye,
  And rent and aching brow, I go;
When, oh the rapture to descry
  The palm-trees green, the fountain low,
    Where welling waters sweetly flow!

IV.

Through life, as o'er that Syrian plain,
  Alone I've wander'd from a child,
Thirsting for love, yet all in vain,
  'Till now, when sweet and undefiled,
    I find Love's fountain in the wild."

De Coucy sang, and then again pressed the token which he had obtained to his lips, and to his heart; when suddenly a loud "Haw, haw! haw, haw!" startled him from his pleasing dreams, and he saw Gallon the fool standing beside him.

"Haw, haw!" cried Gallon, "my master 's turned juggler, and is playing with scraps of gold ribbon, and singing songs to them. By my dexterity! I'll give up the trade: the mystery is no longer honourable—every fool can do it."

"Take care that one fool does not get his ears slit," answered De Coucy.—"Tell me, sir, and tell me truly,—for I know thee, Gallon, and that thou art no more fool than may serve thy turn,—where hast thou been since day break, this morning?"

"I went out on the road to Compiègne," replied Gallon, gravely, "to see how the wolf looked in the sheepfold; and whether the falcon comported himself sociably in the dove's nest. Farther I sought to behold how the shepherd enjoyed the sight of sir wolf toying with the lamb; and still farther ——"

"Villain!" cried De Coucy, "what mean you? Speak me no more apologues, or your skin shall suffer for it! What mean you, I say?" And De Coucy suddenly seized the juggler by the arm, so as to prevent him from escaping by his agility, as he frequently did, from the blow which he menaced to bestow on him with his other hand.

"Well! well!" said Gallon, ever willing to say anything that he thought might alarm, or mortify, or pain his hearers. "I went first, beau sire, to inquire of a dear friend of mine, at the palace—who fell in love with me, because, and on account of, the simple beauty and grace of my snout—whether it be true that Philip the Magnificent had taken actual possession of the lands of your aunt's husband, the Count de Tankerville; and I find he has, and called in all the revenues to the royal treasury. Oh! 'tis a great king and an expeditious!—Haw, haw, haw!" And though within reach of the young knight's arm, Gallon the fool could not repress his glee at the sight of a slight shade of natural mortification which came over his lord's countenance.

"Let him!" cried De Coucy,—"let him take them all! I would rather that he had them than the Duke of Burgundy. Better they should go to strengthen a good king, than to nourish a fat and overgrown vassal.—But you escape me not so, Sir Gallon! You said you went on the road to Compiègne to see how the wolf looked in the sheepfold! Translate, sir fool! Translate! What meant you?"

"Simply to see Count Thibalt d'Auvergne and Queen Agnes de Meranie," replied the jongleur.—"Haw, haw!—Is there any harm in that?"

De Coucy started, as if some one had struck him, experiencing that sort of astonishment which one feels, when suddenly some fact, to which we have long shut our eyes, breaks upon us at once, in all the sharpness of self-evidency—if one may use the word. "'Tis impossible!" cried he. "It cannot be. 'Tis not to be believed!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" cried Gallon the fool. "Not to be doubted, beau Sire De Coucy!—Did he not join your good knighthood as blythe and merry as a lark, after having spent some three months at the court of Istria and Moravia?—Did he not go on well and gaily, till the news came that Philip of France had wedded Agnes de Meranie?—Then did he not, in your own tent, turn paler than the canvass that covered him?—And did he not thenceforth wax wan and lack-witted, sick and sorrowful?—Ha, haw? Ha, haw!"

"Cease thy grinning, knave!" replied De Coucy, sharply, "and know, that even if he does love the Queen, 'tis in all honour and honesty; as one may dedicate one's heart and soul, one's lance and song, to the greatest princess on all the earth, without dreaming aught to her dishonour."

"Haw, haw, haw! haw, haw!" was all the answer of Gallon the fool; and darting away from the relaxed grasp of De Coucy, on whose brow he saw clearly a gathering storm, he rushed down, shouting "Haw, haw! haw, haw!" with as keen an accent of triumph, as if he had gained a victory.

"Is it possible?" said the knight to himself, "that I have been blind for nearly two years to what has been discovered by an idiot on the instant? God bless us all and the holy saints!—D'Auvergne! D'Auvergne! I pity thee, from my soul! for where thou hast loved, and loved so fair a creature, there wilt thou still love, till death. Nor art thou a man to seek to quench thy love in thy lady's dishonour—to learn to gratify thy passion and to despise its object, as some men would. Here thy very nobleness, like plumes to the ostrich, is thy bane and not thy help. And Philip too. If e'er a king was born to be jealous he is the man. I would not for a dukedom love so hopelessly. However, D'Auvergne, I will be near thee—near to thy dangers, though not to thy wealth."

At this point, the contemplations of De Coucy were interrupted by the return of Hugo de Barre, his squire, informing him that the horses were ready, and at the same time laying down on the table before his lord a small leathern bag, apparently full of money.

"What is that?" demanded De Coucy.

"The ransom of the two knights' horses and armour, overthrown by your lance in the tournament," replied the squire.

"Well, then, pay the two hireling grooms," said De Coucy, "whom we engaged to lead the Arabians from Auvergne, since we discharged the Lombards who brought them thither."

"They will not be paid, beau sire," replied the squire. "They both pray you to employ the hire which is their due, in furnishing them with each a horse and arms, and then to let them serve under your banner."

"Well, be it so, good Hugo," replied the knight. "Where—God knows where I shall find food to cram their mouths withal! 'Twill add two, however, to my poor following. Then, with thee and the page, and my own two varlets, we shall make seven:—eight with Gallon the fool. By my faith, I forgot the juggler, who is as stout a man-at-arms as any amongst us. But, as I said, get thee gone with the men to the Rue St. Victor, where the Haubergers dwell. Give them each a sword, a shield, a corslet, and a steel bonnet: but bid them cast away those long knives hanging by their thighs, which I love not;—they always make me think of that one wherewith the villain slave of Mahound ripped up my good battle-horse Hero; and would have slain me with it too, if I had not dashed him to atoms with my mace. Ride quick, and overtake me and the rest on the road: we go at a foot-pace." So saying, Guy de Coucy descended the narrow staircase of his dwelling; and, after having spoken for a few moments with one of the attendants of the Count d'Auvergne, who had remained behind, he mounted his horse, and rode slowly out of the city of Paris.

There is no possible mode of progression, that I know of, more engendering of melancholy than the foot-pace of a horse when one is alone. It is so like the slow and retarded steps with which, whether we will or not, we are obliged to pursue the high road of life; and each object, as it rises on our view, seems such a long age in its approach, that one feels an almost irresistible desire, at every other step, to give the whip or spur, and accelerate the heart's slow beatings by some more rapid movement of the body. Did one wish to cultivate their stupidity, let them ride their horse, at a walk, over one of the long, straight roads of France.

The face of the country, however, was in those days very different from what it is at present; and the narrow, earthy road over which De Coucy travelled, wound in and out over hills and through forests: now plunging into the deep wood; now emerging by the bright stream; now passing, for a short space, through vineyards and fields, with a hamlet or a village by the road-side; now losing itself in wilds and solitudes, where one might well suppose that Adam's likeness had never been seen.

The continual changing of the objects around relieved, of course, the monotony of the slow pace at which De Coucy had condemned himself to proceed, while expecting his squire's return; and a calm sort of melancholy was all he felt, as he revolved in his mind the various points of his own situation and that of his friend, the Count d'Auvergne.

In regard to himself, new feelings had sprung up in his bosom

—feelings which he had heard of, but never known before. He loved, and he fancied he was beloved; and dreams, and hopes, and expectations, softer, calmer, more profound than ever had reached him in camps or courts, flowed in upon his heart, like the stream of some deep, pure river, and washed away all that was rude and light, or unworthy in his bosom. Yet, at the same time, all the tormenting contentions of hope and fear—the fine hair-balancings of doubt and anxiety—the soul torturings of that light and malicious imp, Love, took possession of the heart of De Coucy; and he calculated, within the hundred thousandth part of a line, how much chance there existed of Isadore of the Mount not loving him,—and of her loving some one else,—and of her father, who was rich, rejecting him, who was poor,—and of his having promised her to some one else;—and so on to infinity. At length, weary of his own reasonings thereupon, and laughing at himself for combating the chimeras of his own imagination, he endeavoured to turn his thoughts to other things, humming as he went—

" 'The man's a fool—the man's a fool
Who lets Love use him for a tool:
But is that man the gods above,
Himself unused, who uses love.'

—And so will I," continued De Coucy, mentally. "It shall prompt me to great deeds, and to mighty efforts.—I will go to every court in Europe, and challenge them all to do battle with me upon the question. I will fight in every combat and every skirmish that can be met with, till they cannot refuse her to me, out of pure shame."

Such were the determinations of De Coucy in the age of chivalry, and he was one more likely than most men to keep such determinations. They, however, like all resolutions, were of course modified by circumstances; and in the meanwhile, his squire, Hugo, rejoined him with the two varlets, who had been hired in Auvergne to lead his horses, but who were now fitted to make a figure in the train of so warlike a knight.

Still the prospect of his cold and vacant home, with no smile to give him welcome, and, as he well knew, nothing but poverty for his entertainment, sat somewhat heavily upon the young knight's heart. To lodge upon the battle plain, under a covering that scarce excluded the weather; to feed on the coarsest and most scanty food; to endure all perils and privations, for chivalry's, religion's, or his country's sake, was nothing to the bold and hardy soldier, whose task and pride it was so to suffer: but, for the châtelain, De Coucy, to return to the castle where his fathers had lived in splendour,—to the bowers and halls where his infancy had been nursed with tenderness,—and to find all empty and desolate; the wealth and magnificence wasted in the thousand fruitless enterprises of the Crusades, and the loved and familiar laid low in the melancholy dwellings of the gone, was bitter, sadly bitter, even for a young, light heart, and unquenchable spirit like his.

One of his ancestors, who, in the reign of Henry the First, had founded the younger branch of the De Coucy's, of which he was now the sole representative, had done important services to the crown, and had been rewarded by the hand of Aleonore de Magny, on the Seine, heiress of the last terre libre, or free land, in France; and this his race had maintained, in its original freedom, against all the surrounding barons, and even against the repeated efforts of every successive king, who, on all occasions, attempted to exact homage by force, or to win it by policy. His father, indeed, before taking the cross, which he did at the persuasion of Louis the Seventh, had put his lands under the protection of the King, who, on his part, promised to guard its inviolability against all and every one; and acknowledged by charter under his hand and seal, that it was free and independent of the crown.

The *manoir*, or *castel*, of every baron of the time, was always a building of more or less strength; but it is to be supposed, of course, that the château attached to lands in continual dispute, was fortified with an additional degree of precaution and care. Nor was this wanting in the château of De Coucy Magny, as it was called: wall and battlement, tower, turret, and bartizan, overhung every angle of the hill on which it was placed, and rendered it almost impregnable, according to the mode of warfare of those days.

When De Coucy had left it, with his father's men-at-arms, though age had blackened it, not one stone was less in the castle walls,—not a weed was on the battlements; and even the green ivy, that true parasite, which sucks the vital strength of that which supports it, was carefully removed from the masonry.

But, oh! how fast is decay sped on, even by the neglect of ten short years! When De Coucy returned, the evening sun was setting behind the hill on which the castle stood; and, as he led his scanty band of horsemen up the winding and difficult path, he could see, by the rough, uneven outline of the dark mass before him, what ravages time had already made. High above the rest, the donjon, which used to seem proud of its square regularity, now towered with one entire angle of its battlements given way, and with many a bush and shrub waving its long feathery foliage from window and from loophole; while the neglected state of the road, and even the tameness of the wild animals in the woods near the château; the hares and the deer, which stood and gazed with their large round eyes for many moments at De Coucy and his followers before they started away, told, with a sad voice, that man was seldom seen there.

De Coucy sighed as he rode on; and, stopping at the gates of the barbican, which, thickly plated and studded with iron, opposed all entrance, wound a long blast upon his horn. A moment after, the noise of bolts and bars was heard, as if the doors were about to be thrown open; but then again came the sound of an old man's voice, exclaiming, in a tone of querulous anger—"Hold, hold! villain Calord! Will you give up the castle to the cotereaux? Hold, I say! or I will break thy pate! I saw them from the beffroy. They are a band of cotereaux. Go round to the serfs' sheds, and bid them come and take their bows to the walls. Up you! and ring the bancloche, that we may have the soldiers from Magny!"

"Onfroy! Onfroy!" shouted De Coucy. "Open your gates! 'Tis I, Guy de Coucy!"

"Your voice I know not!" roared the old man, in reply. "My young lord had a soft, sweet voice; and yours is as deep as a bell. I know not your voice, fair sir.—Man the walls, I say, Calord! 'Tis all a trick," he continued, speaking to his companion. "Sound the bancloche!"

"If you know not my voice," cried De Coucy, "surely you should know the blast I have sounded on my horn!"

"Sound again, beau sire!—sound again!" cried the old man. "I will know your blast among ten thousand, if you be a De Coucy; and if you be my young lord, I will know it in all the world."

De Coucy put his horn to his lips, and reiterated his blast, when instantly the old man exclaimed—"'Tis he!—'tis he, Calord!—Open the gates—open the gates, quick! lest I die of joy before I see his face again! 'Tis he himself! The blessed Virgin, queen of heaven, be praised for all things! Give me the keys—give me the keys, Calord!" and no sooner were the doors pushed back, than, casting himself on his knees before his lord's horse, with the tears of joy coursing each other rapidly down his withered face, the old seneschal exclaimed, "Enter, noble châtelain! and take your own; and God be praised, my dear boy! and the holy Virgin, and St. John, and St. Peter, but more especially St. Martin of Tours! for having brought you safe back again from the dangers of Palestine, where your noble father has left his valiant bones! Here are the keys, which I offer into your hand, beau sire," he continued, looking earnestly at De Coucy, and wiping away the salt rheum that obscured his sight. "And yet I can scarce believe," he added, "that young Guy, the last of the three fair youths—he who was not up to my shoulder when he went, whom I first taught to draw a bow, or wheel a horse—that young Guy the page—and a saucy stripling he was, too—my blessing on his waggish head!—that young Guy the page should have grown into so tall and strong a man as you, beau sire!—Are you not putting upon me? Was it truly you that blew that blast?" and his eye ran over the persons who followed behind his lord.—"But no!" he added, "it must be he! I know his blue eye, and the curl of his lip; and I have heard how he is a great knight now-a-days, and slays Saracens, and bears away the prizes at tournays:—I have heard it all!"

De Coucy calmly let the old man finish his speech, without offering to take the keys, which from time to time he proffered, as a sort of interjection between the various parts of his disjointed discourse. "It is even I, good Onfroy," replied he, at last: "keep the keys!—keep the keys, good old man!—they cannot be in worthier hands than yours. But now let us in. I bring you, as you see, no great reinforcement; but I hope your garrison is not so straitened for provisions, that you cannot give us some supper, for we are hungry, though we be few."

"We will kill a hog—we will kill a hog, beau sire!" replied the old man. "I have kept chiefly to the hogs, beau sire, since you were gone, for they cost nothing to keep—the acorns of the forest serve them—and they have increased wonderfully! Oh, we have plenty of hogs; but as to cows, and sheep, and things of that kind, that eat much and profit little, I was obliged to abandon them when I sent you the last silver I could get, as you commanded."

De Coucy signified his perfect indifference as to whether his supper consisted of mutton, beef, or pork; and riding through the barbican, into the enclosure of the walls, he crossed the court and alighted at the great gates of the hall, which were thrown open to receive him.

Calord, the servant or varlet of the seneschal, had run on before, to light a torch; for the day was beginning to fail, and the immense apartment was of its own nature dark and gloomy; but still, all within was dim. The rays of the torch, though held high, and waved round and round, scarcely served to show some dark, lustreless suits of armour hung against the walls; and the figures of some of the serfs, who had stolen into the farther extremity of the hall, to catch a glimpse of their returned lord, seemed like spirits moving about on the dark confines of another world: while more than one bat, startled even by the feeble light, took wing and fluttered amongst the old banners overhead. At the same time, as if dreary sounds were wanting to complete the gloominess of the young knight's return, the clanging of his footsteps upon the pavement of the empty hall awoke a long, wild echo, which, prolonged through the open doors communicating with untenanted halls and galleries beyond, seemed the very voice of Solitude bewailing her disturbed repose.

It all fell cold upon De Coucy's heart; and, laying his hand on the old seneschal's shoulder, as he was about to begin one of his long discourses:—"Do not speak to me just now, good Onfroy!" said the young knight; "I am not in a vein to listen to anything. But throw on a fire in yon empty hearth; for, though it be July, this hall has a touch of January. Thou hast the key of the books too:—bring them all down, good Onfroy; I will seek some moral that may teach contentment.—Set down my harp beside me, good page." And having given these directions, De Coucy cast himself into the justice-chair of his ancestors, and, covering his eyes with his hands, gave himself up to no very sweet contemplations.

CHAPTER XIII.

It would seem a strange command in our day, were any one to order his servant to bring down the library, and certainly would infer a much more operose undertaking than fell to the lot of old Onfroy, the seneschal, who, while Calord, his man, cast almost a whole tree in the chimney, and the varlets of De Coucy unloaded his baggage-horses, easily brought down a small wooden box, containing the whole literature of the château. And yet, perhaps, had not the De Coucy's, from father to son, been distinguished trouvères, no such treasure of letters would their castle have contained; for, to count the nobles of the kingdom throughout, scarce one in a hundred could read and write.

De Coucy, however, had wasted—as it was then called—some of his earlier years in the study of profane literature, till the death of his two elder brothers had called him from such pursuits; from which time his whole course of reading had been in the romances of the day, where figured either Charlemagne with his peers and paladins, or the heroes, writers, and philosophers of antiquity, all mingled together, and habited as knights and magicians.

A manuscript, however, in those days, was of course much more precious in the eyes of those who could read, than such a thing possibly can be now; and De Coucy, hoping, as many have done since, to shelter himself behind a book, from the sharp attacks of unpleasant thought, eagerly opened the manifold bars and bucklings of the wooden case, and took out the first vellum that his hand fell upon. This proved to be but a collection of tensons, lais, and pastourelles, — all of which he knew by heart, so that he was obliged to search farther. The next he came to had nearly shared the same fate, being a copy of the Life of Louis the Fat, written in Latin a few years before, by Suger, abbot of St. Denis. The Latin, however, was easy, and De Coucy's erudition coming to his aid, he read various passages from those various pages, wherein the great minister who wrote it gives such animated pictures of all that passed immediately previous to the very age and scenes amidst which the young knight was then living. At length his eye rested on the epigraph of the sixteenth chapter, "Concerning the treachery committed at the Roche Guyon, by William, brother-in-law of the king;—concerning, also, the death of Guy, and the speedy vengeance that overtook William."

No title could have been more attractive in the eyes of De Coucy; and skipping a very little of his text, where his remembrance of the language failed him, he went on to read that which follows:—

"Upon a promontory formed by the great river Seine, at a spot difficult of access, is built an ignoble castle, of a frightful aspect, called La Roche Guyon. On the surface of the promontory the castle is invisible, being hollowed out of the bowels of the high rock. The skilful hand of him who formed it has cut the high rock itself on the side of the hill, and by a mean and narrow opening has practised a subterranean habitation of immense extent.

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"This subterranean castle, not more hideous in the sight of men than in the sight of God, had about this time for its lord, Guy de la Roche Guyon,—a young man of gentle manners, a stranger to the wickedness of his ancestors. He had indeed interrupted its course, and showed himself resolved to lead a tranquil and honourable life, free from their infamous and greedy rapacity.

"Surprised by the very position of his wretched castle, and massacred by the treachery of his own father-in-law, the most wicked of the wicked, he lost, by an unexpected blow, both his dwelling and his life.

"William, his father-in-law, was by birth a Norman; and, unequalled in treachery, he made himself appear the dearest friend of his daughter's husband. This man, tormented by black envy, and brewing wicked designs, unhappily found, on the evening of a certain Sunday, an opportunity of executing his diabolical designs. He came then, with his arms covered with a mantle, and accompanied by a handful of assassins, and mingled himself, though with very different thoughts, amongst a crowd of pious people hastening to a church, which communicated by a passage in the rock with the subterranean castle of Guy. For some time, while the rest gave themselves up to prayer, he feigned to pray also; but, in truth, occupied himself in examining attentively the passage communicating with the dwelling of his son-in-law. At that moment, Guy entered the church; when, drawing his sword, and seconded by his criminal associates, William, madly yielding to the iniquity of his heart, cast himself into the doorway, and struck down his son-in-law, who was already smiling a welcome upon him, when he felt the edge of his sword. The noble bride of the châtelain, stupified at the sight, tore her hair and her cheeks, after the manner of women in their anger, and running towards her husband, without fearing the fate that menaced her, she cast herself upon him to cover his body from the blows of the murderer, crying, while he received a thousand wounds,—"Vile butchers! slay me rather than him!—What has he done to merit death?"

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"Seizing her by the hair, the assassins dragged her away from her husband, who, crushed by their repeated blows, pierced by their swords, and almost torn in pieces with his various wounds, soon expired under their hands. Not contented yet, with a degree of cruelty worthy of Herod, such of his unhappy children as they could find they dashed mercilessly against the rock——"*

"Give me my lance!" cried De Coucy, starting up, with his blood boiling at this picture of an age so near his own—"give me my lance, ho! By all the saints of France——"

But at that moment remembering that the event which Suger recounted must have taken place full fifty years before, and therefore that none of the actors therein could be a fit object for the vengeance which he had thought of inflicting with his own hand, he sat down again, and read out the tale, running rapidly through the murderer's first triumphant contemplation of the property he had obtained by the death of his son-in-law, and even of his own daughter, but pausing with an angry sort of gladness over the detail of the signal punishment inflicted on him and his accomplices. Nor did he find the barbarous aggravation of tearing his heart from his bosom, and casting his body, attached to a plank, into the river Seine, to float to his native place, in any degree too horrible an award for so horrible a villain. On the contrary, starting from his chair, with all the circumstances of his own fate forgotten, he was striding up and down the hall, wishing that this same blood-thirsty Guillaume had been alive then to meet him in fight; when suddenly, just as the old seneschal was bustling in to lay out the table for his young lord's supper, the long, loud blast of a horn sounded at the outer gates.

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* This singular picture of the barbarism of the age immediately preceding that of Philip Augustus is rendered as literally as possible from the Life of Louis le Gros, by Suger, Abbot of St. Denis.

"Throw open the gates, and see who is there!" cried De Coucy. "By the blessed rood! I have visitors early!"

"In the holy Virgin's name! beau sire, open not the gates to-night!" cried the old seneschal. "You do not know what you do. All the neighbouring barons have driven the cotereaux off their own lands on to yours, because it is here a *terre libre;* and there are at least two thousand in the woods round about. Be ruled, Sir Guy!—be ruled!"

"Ha, say you?" cried De Coucy. "But how is it, good Onfroy, that you can then drive out the swine you speak of, to feed in the forest?"

"Because—because—because, beau sire," replied the old man, hesitating as if he feared the effect of his answer,—"because I agreed with their chief, that if he and his would never show themselves within half a league of the castle, I would pay him a tribute of two fat hogs monthly."

"A tribute!" thundered De Coucy, striking his clenched fist upon the table—"a tribute!" Then suddenly lowering his voice, he added: "Oh, my good Onfroy! what are the means of a De Coucy shrunk to, that his castle, in his absence even, should pay a tribute to thieves and pickpurses! How many able serfs have you within the walls? I know your power was small. How many?"

"But nine good men, and three old ones," replied the seneschal, shaking his head sadly; "and they are but serfs, you know, my lord—I am but weakling, now-a-day; and Calord, though a freeman, has known no service."

"And how many vassals bound to furnish a man?" demanded De Coucy.—"Throw open the gates, I say!" he continued, turning fiercely upon Calord, while the horn sounded again. "I would fain see the coterel who should dare to take two steps in this hall with Guy de Coucy standing by his own hearth. How many vassals, Onfroy?"

"But seven, beau sire," replied the old man, looking from time to time towards the door of the hall, which led out into the court, and which Calord had left open behind him,—"but seven, Sir Guy; and they are only bound to a forty days' riding in the time of war."

"And now tell me, Onfroy," continued De Coucy, standing as calmly with his back towards the door as if he had been surrounded by a host of his friends, "if you have paid this tribute, why are you now afraid of these thieves?"

"Because, Sir Guy," replied the seneschal, "the last month's hogs have not been sent; there being soldiers of the king's down at the town, within sound of the bancloche.—But see, Sir Guy! see! they are pouring into the court! I told you how 'twould be!—See, see! torches and all! Well, one can die now as well as a week hence!"

De Coucy turned, and at first the number of horsemen that were filing into the court, two at a time, as they mounted the steep and narrow road, almost induced him to bid the gates be shut, that he might deal with them with some equality: but a second glance changed his purpose, for though here and there was to be seen a hauberk or a plastron glistening in the torchlight, by far the greater part of the horsemen were in the garb of peace.

"These are no cotereaux, good Onfroy," said he, staying the old seneschal, who was in the act of drawing down from the wall some rusty monument of wars long gone. "These are peaceable guests, and must be as well treated as we may. For the cotereaux, I will take order with them before I be two days older; and they shall find the woods of De Coucy Magny too hot a home for summer weather.—Who is it seeks De Coucy?" he continued, advancing as he saw one of the cavalcade dismounting at the hall door.

"Guillaume de la Roche Guyon," replied the stranger, walking forward into the hall; while De Coucy, with his mind full of all he had just been reading connected with that name, instinctively started back, and laid his hand on his dagger; but, instantly remembering himself, he advanced to meet the cavalier, and welcomed him to the château.

The stranger was a slight young man, without other arms than his sword; but he wore knightly spurs and belt, and in the front of his cap appeared the form of a grasshopper, beautifully modelled in gold. His features had instantly struck De Coucy as being familiar to him, but it was principally this little emblem, joined with a silk scarf hanging from his neck, that fully recalled to his mind the young troubadour he had seen at the château of Vic le Comte.

"I crave your hospitality, beau sire, for myself and train," said the young stranger. "Hardly acquainted with this part of fair France, for my greater feofs lie in sweet Provence, I have lost my way in these forests—But methinks we have met before, noble châtelain;" and as he recognised De Coucy, a slight degree of paleness spread over the youth's face.

De Coucy, however, remarked it not: his was one of those generous natures, from which resentments pass like clouds from the summer sun, and he forgot entirely a slight feeling of jealousy which the young troubadour had excited in his bosom while at Vic le Comte: and, instead of wishing, as he had then done, to have him face to face in deadly arms, he welcomed him to the château with every hospitable greeting.

"'Tis but an hour since I arrived myself, good knight," said he; "and after a ten years' absence my castle is scantily furnished for the reception of such an honourable guest. But see thou servest us the best of all we have, Onfroy, and speedily."

"Haw, haw! haw, haw!" cried Gallon the fool, with his head protruded through one of the doors—"haw, haw! The lion feasted the fox, and the fox got the best of the dinner."

"I will make thee juggle till thy limbs ache," said De Coucy, "and this very night, Sir Gallon! So will I punish thine insolence.—'Tis a juggler slave, beau sire," he continued, turning to Guillaume de la Roche Guyon, who gazed with some astonishment at the juggler's apparition. "I bought him of the Infidels, into whose power he had fallen, several years ago. He must have been once a shrewd-witted knave, and wants not sense now when he chooses to employ it: but for some trick he played his miscreant master, the Saracen tied him by the legs to his horse's tail one day, and dragged him a good league across the sands to sell him at our camp, in time of truce. Poor Gallon himself says his brain was then turned the wrong way, and has never got right again since, so that he breaks his sour jests on every one."

The tables were soon spread, and the provisions, which indeed consisted of little else than pork or *bacon*, as it was then called in France, with the addition of two unfortunate fowls, doomed to suffer for their lord's return, were laid out in various trenchers all the way down the middle of the board. De Coucy and his guest took their places, side by side, at the top; and all the free men in the train of either, were ranged along the sides. No fine *dressoir*, covered with silver and with gold, ornamented the hall of the young knight; all the plate which the crusades had left in his castle, consisting of two large hanaps, or drinking cups of silver, and a saltcellar in the form of a ship. Jugs of earthenware, and cups of horn, lay ranged by platters of wood and pewter; and a momentary sting of mortified pride passed through De Coucy's heart, as the poverty of his house stood exposed to the eyes of the young troubadour.

For his part, however, Guillaume de la Roche seemed perfectly contented with his fare and reception; praised the wine, which was indeed excellent, and evinced a traveller's appetite towards the hot steaks of pork, and the freshly slaughtered fowls.

Gradually De Coucy began to feel more at his ease, and, forgetting the poverty of his household display, laughed and jested with his guest. Pledging each other in many a cup, and at last adding thereto many a song, the hours passed rapidly away. Gallon the fool was called; and a stiff cord being stretched across the apartment, he performed feats thereon, that would have broken the heart of any modern rope-dancer, adding flavour and piquancy to the various contortions of his limbs, by the rich and racy ugliness of his countenance.

"That cannot be his real nose?" observed the young Provençal, turning with an inquiring look to De Coucy.

"By all the saints of heaven! it is," replied De Coucy; "at least, I have seen him with no other."

"It cannot be!" said the troubadour, almost in the words of Slawkenbergius. "There never was a nose like that! 'Tis surely a sausage of Bijore—both shape, and colour, and size. I will never believe it to be a true nose!"

"Ho! Gallon," cried De Coucy. "Bring thy nose here, and convince this fair knight that 'tis thine own lawful property."

Gallon obeyed; and jumping down from his rope, approached the place where the two knights sat, swaying his proboscis up and down in such a manner, as to show that it was almost preternaturally under the command of his volition.

This, however, did not satisfy the young Provençal, who, as he came nearer, was seized with an irresistible desire to meddle with the strange appendix to the jongleur's face; and, giving way to this sort of boyish whim, at the moment when Gallon was nearest, he seized his nose between his finger and thumb, and gave it a tweak fully sufficient to demonstrate its identity with the rest of his flesh.

Gallon's hand flew to his dagger; and it was already gleaming half out of the sheath, when a loud "How now!" from De Coucy stayed him; and affecting to take the matter as a joke, he threw a somerset backwards and bounded out of the hall.

"I could not, have resisted had he been an emperor!" said the young man, laughing. "Oh, 'tis a wonderful appendage, and gives great dignity to his countenance!"

"The dignity of ugliness," said De Coucy. "But take care that Gallon the fool comes not across you with his dagger. He is as revengeful as an ape."

"Oh, I will give him some gold," said the troubadour. "One touch of such a nose as that is worth all the sheckles of Solomon's temple."

De Coucy laughed, and the evening passed on in uninterrupted glee and harmony; but when the young knight found that his new companion was the grandson of the unfortunate Guy de la Roche Guyon, the account of whose assassination he had just read, his heart seemed to open to him more than ever; and telling him, with a smile at the remembrance of having called for his lance, how much the history had moved him, Guy de Coucy poured forth his free and generous heart in professions of interest and regard. The young stranger seemed to meet him as frankly; but to a close observer, perhaps, the very rounding of his phrases would have betrayed more study than was consistent with the same effusion of feeling which might be seen in all De Coucy's actions.

The châtelain, however, did not remark any defect; but after having commanded a sleeping cup to be brought to the young Provençal's bedroom, he led him thither himself. Here indeed his pride was somewhat gratified to find that the old seneschal had preserved the sleeping apartments with the most heedful care from the same decay that had affected the rest of the castle, and that the rich tapestries over the walls, the hangings of the bed, and its coverings of miniver and sable, attested that the family of De Coucy Magny had once at least known days of splendour.

The next morning, by sunrise, the whole party in the castle were stirring; and Guillaume de la Roche Guyon gave orders to prepare his horses. De Coucy pressed his stay, but could not prevail; and after having adduced a thousand motives to induce his guest to prolong his visit, he added one, which to his mind was irresistible. "I find," said he, "that during my absence, fighting for the recovery of Christ's cross and sepulchre, a band of lawless routiers and cotereaux have refuged themselves in my woods. Some two thousand, they are called; but let us strike off one-half for exaggeration. Now, I propose to drive them out with fire and sword, and doubt not to muster fifty good men-at-arms. Your train amounts to nearly the same number, and I shall be very happy to share the honour and pastime with so fair a knight, if you be disposed to join me."

The young man coloured slightly, but declined. "Important business," he said, "which he was afraid must have suffered by the mishap of his having lost his way the evening before, would utterly prevent him from enjoying the great honour of fighting under Sir Guy de Coucy;—but he should be most happy," he added, "to leave all the armed men of his train, if they could be of assistance in expelling the banditti from the territories of the Sire de Coucy. As for himself, he no way feared to pursue his journey with merely his unarmed servants."

De Coucy, however, declined—somewhat drily too; his favourable opinion of the young stranger being greatly diminished by his neglecting, on any account, so fair an opportunity of exercising his prowess and gaining renown. He conducted him courteously to his horse, notwithstanding, drank the stirrup cup with him at parting, and wishing him a fair and prosperous journey, returned into his castle.

Guillaume de la Roche Guyon rode on in silence at the head of his troop, till he had descended to the very bottom of the hill on which the château stood. Then, turning to one of his favourite retainers, as they entered the forest, he cried—"By the Lord! Philippeau, saw ye ever such beggarly fare? I slept not all night, half-choked as I was with hog's flesh. And did you hear how he pressed me to my meat, as if he fain would have choked me outright? The Lord deliver us from such poor châtelains, and send them back to fight in Palestine."

"So say I, beau sire," replied the retainer: "if they will take ship thither, we will pray for a fair wind."

"And the cups of horn, Philippeau," cried his lord, "and the wooden platters—did you mark them? Oh, they were well worthy the viands they contained!"

"So say I, beau sire," replied the living echo. "May they never contain any thing better!—for château and châtelain, dinner and dishes, were all of a piece."

"And think of his dreaming that I would go against the honest cotereaux with him!" cried the youth—"risking my horse and my life, and losing my time: all to rid his land of some scores of men as brave as himself, I dare say, and a great deal richer. 'Twould have been a rare folly, indeed!"

"So say I, beau sire," rejoined the inevitable Philippeau; "that would have been turning his man before he had shown himself your master.—Ha, ha, ha!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" shouted a voice in answer, whose possessor remained for a moment invisible. The next instant, however, the legs of a man appeared dangling from one of the trees, a few yards before them; then down dropped his body at the extent of his arms; and letting himself fall like a piece of lead, Gallon the fool stood motionless in their way.

"Ha!" cried Guillaume de la Roche, drawing forward what was called his *aumonière*,* a sort of pouch by his side, and taking out a couple of pieces of gold, "Our good jongleur come for his guerdon!—Hold, fellow!" and he cast the money to Gallon the fool, who caught each piece before it fell to the ground.

"Haw, haw! haw, haw!" cried Gallon. "Gramercy, beau sire! gramercy! Now will I tell thee a piece of news," he continued, in his abrupt and unconnected manner,—"a piece of news that never should you have heard but for these two pieces of gold. Your lady love is at the castle of the Sire de Montmorency. Speed thither fast, and you shall win her yet.—Haw, haw! Do you understand? Win her old father first. Tell him of your broad lands, and your rich castles; for old Sir Julian loves gold, as if it paved the way to heaven.—Haw, haw, haw! When his love is won, never fear but that his daughter's will come after; and then, all because thou hast broad lands enough of thine own, thou shalt have all good Count Julian's to back them.—Haw, haw! haw, haw! Thus it is we give to those that want not; and to those who want, we spit in the face—a goodly gift! — Haw, haw! The world is mad, not I — 'tis but the mishap of being single in one's opinion! — Haw, haw, haw!" and darting away into the forest without staying farther question, he was soon lost to their sight.

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* This part of the dress was a small pouch borne under the arm, and called escarcelle, or pera, when carried by pilgrims to the Holy Land. With the utmost reverence for the learning, talent, and patience of Ducange, it appears to me that he was mistaken in his interpretation of a passage of Cassian, relative to this part of the pilgrim's dress. The sentence in Cassian is as follows: "Ultimus est habitus eorum pellis caprina, quæ melotes, vel pera appellatur, et baculus;" which Ducange affirms to mean, that they wore a dress of goat-skins, a wallet, and a stick. Embarrassed by taking *habitus* in the limited sense of a garment, I should rather be inclined to think that the author merely meant that the last part of their (the monks') dress was what is called a pera, made of goat-skins, and a stick, and not three distinct articles, as Ducange imagines.—See *Ducange*, Dissert. xv.

No sooner, however, had Gallon the fool assured himself that he was out of reach of pursuit, than suddenly stopping, he cast himself on the ground, and rolled over and over two or three times, while he made the wood ring with his laughter. "Now have I murdered him! — now have I slaughtered him! — now have I given his throat to the butcher!" cried he, "as sure as if I held his head under knock-me-down De Coucy's battle-axe! — now will he go and buy the old fool Julian's consent and promise, for gold and rich furniture.—Haw, haw, haw! Then will Isadore refuse, and let the De Coucy know. — Haw, haw! Then will De Coucy come with lance and shield, and provoke my gallant to the fight, which for his knighthood he dare not refuse—then will my great man-slayer, my iron-fisted singer of songs, crush me this tiny, smooth-faced, quaint apparalled imp of Provence, as I've seen a great eater crunch a lark. — Haw, haw! haw, haw! And all for having tweaked my nose, though none of them know anything about it! He will insult my countenance no more, I trow, when the velvet black moles are digging through his cold heart with their white hands. Ah, cursed countenance!" he cried, as if seized with some sudden emotion of rage, and striking his clenched fist hard upon his hideous face—"Ah, cursed countenance! thou hast brought down upon me mock and mimicry, hatred and contempt! Everything is loved — everything is sought — everything is admired, but me; and I am fled from by all that see me. I am hated, and I hate myself- I am the devil—surely I am the devil!—and if so, I will enjoy my reign. — Beware! beware! ye that mock me; for I will live by gnawing your hearts — I will, I will! — Haw, haw!—that I will!" and suddenly bounding up, he caught one of the large boughs above his head, swung himself backward and forward for a minute in the air, and then springing forward, with a loud screaming laugh, flew back to the castle like an arrow shot from a bow.

CHAPTER XIV.

We must now return for a time to the château of Compiègne, in one of the principal chambers of which, surrounded by a bevy of fair maids, sat Agnes de Meranie, bending her graceful head over an embroidery frame. As far as one might judge from the lively colours upon the ground of white satin, she was engaged in working a coat of arms; and she plied her small fingers busily as if in haste. Her maids also were all fully engaged, each in some occupation which had in a degree a reference to that of the Queen. One richly embroidered a sword belt with threads of gold; another wove a golden fringe for the coat of arms; and a third was equally intent in tracing various symbols on a banner.

From what internal emotion it is hard to say—for song is not always a sign of joy — the Queen, as she sat at her work, sang, from time to time, some of the verses of one of the cançons of the day, in a sweet low voice, and in that sort of indifferent tone, which seemed to show, that while her hands were busy with the embroidery, and her voice was as mechanically modulating the song, that nobler part of the mind, which apparently dwells more in the heart than the brain, and whose thoughts are feelings, was busy with very different matter.

THE SEEKER FOR LOVE.

"Oh, where is Love?" the pilgrim said;
"Is he pris'ner, dead, or fled?
I've sought him far, with spear and lance,
To meet him, seize and bind him.
I've sought him in each tower of France,
But never yet could find him—
There."—

"Should these flowers, in the treasure, be azure or gold, Blanche?" demanded the Queen.

"Gold, madam!—Oh, certainly gold!" replied the lady; and the Queen resumed her work and her song.

"Oh, where is Love?" he said again;
"Let me not seek, and seek in vain!
In the proud cities have I been,
In cottages I've sought him,
'Midst lords, 'midst shepherds on the green,
But none of them have brought him—
There."

"He is banished," replied the Knight,
"By the cold looks of our ladies bright!"—
"He is gone," said the lady fair,
"To sport in Eden's arbours,
As for men's hearts, his old repair,
Treason alone now harbours—
There."

"I have found him," the pilgrim said;
"In my heart he has laid his head.
Though banish'd from knights and ladies rare,
And even shepherds discard him,
In my bosom shall be the god's lair,
And with silken fetters I'll guard him—
There."

"Was it not on Thursday the King went?" demanded the Queen.

"No, madam," answered the lady who had spoken before; "he went on Friday; and he cannot be back till the day after to-morrow, if he come then; for that false, uncourteous King of England is as full of wiles as of villanies, and will never give a clear reply; so that it always costs my lord the King longer to deal with him than any of his other vassals. Were I his brother, the Earl of Salisbury, who has been twice at Paris, and is as good a knight as ever wore a lady's favour, I would sweep his head off with my long sword, and restore the crown to our little Arthur, who is the rightful King."

"Where is the young truant?" demanded the Queen. "I would fain ask him whether he would have these straps on the shoulder of plain silk or of gold. See for him, good girl!"

But at that moment a part of the tapestry was suddenly pushed aside, and a slight, graceful boy, of about fifteen, sprang into the room. He was gaily dressed in a light tunic of sky-blue silk, and a jewelled bonnet of the same colour, which showed well on his bright, fair skin, and the falling curls of his sunny hair.

"Not so far off as you thought, fair cousin," said he, casting himself on one knee beside the Queen, and kissing one of the small delicate hands that lay on the embroidery frame.

"Not eaves-dropping, I hope, Arthur?" said Agnes de Meranie. "You, who are so soon to become a knight, are too noble for that, I am sure."

"Oh, surely!" said the boy, looking up in her face with an ingenuous blush. "I had but been to see my mother; and, as I came back, I stopped at the window above the stairs to watch an eagle that was towering over the forest so proudly, I could not help wishing I had been an eagle, to rise up like it into the skies, and see all the world stretched out beneath me. Then I heard you singing—and there was no harm in staying to listen to that, you know, belle cousine," he added, looking up with a smile.

"And how is the Lady Constance, now?" demanded the Queen.

"Oh! she is somewhat better," replied Arthur. "And she bade me thank you, fair Queen, in her name, as well as my own, for undertaking the task which her illness prevented her from accomplishing."

"No thanks! no thanks! Prince Arthur," replied the Queen. "Is it not the duty of every dame in France to aid in arming a knight when called upon? But tell me, sir runaway, for I have been waiting these ten minutes to know,—will you have these straps of cloth of gold, or simple silk?"

This question gave rise to a very important discussion, which was just terminated by Arthur's predilection for gold, when a page, entering, announced to the Queen that Guerin, the Chancellor, desired a few minutes' audience.

The Queen turned somewhat pale, for the first sting of adversity had gone deep in her heart, and she trembled lest it should be repeated. She commanded the attendant, however, to admit the minister, endeavouring, as much as possible, to conceal the alarm and uneasiness which his visit caused her. The only symptom, indeed, of impatience which escaped her appeared in her turning somewhat quickly round, and pointing to a favourite falcon which stood on its perch in one of the windows, and amused itself, on seeing some degree of bustle, by uttering one or two loud screams, thinking probably it was about to be carried to the field.

"Take that bird away, Arthur, good youth," said the Queen; "it makes my head ache."

Arthur obeyed; and as he left the room the Hospitaller entered, but not alone. He was followed by a tall, thin, wasted man, dressed in a brown frock, or *bure*, over which his white beard flowed down to his girdle; in fact, it was Bernard the hermit, who, for the purposes we shall explain, had once more for a time quitted his solitude, and accompanied the minister of Philip Augustus to Compiègne.

The Hospitaller bowed his head as he advanced towards the Queen, and the hermit gave her his blessing; but still, for a moment, the heart of poor Agnes de Meranie beat so fast, that she could only reply by pointing to two seats which her women left vacant by her side.

"Madam, we come to speak to you on matters of some importance," said Guerin, looking towards the Queen's women, who, though withdrawn from her immediate proximity, still stood at a little distance. "Would it please you to let us have a few minutes of your presence alone? Myself and my brother Bernard are both unworthy members of the holy church, and therefore may claim a lady's ear for a short space, without falling into the danger of evil tongues."

"I fear no evil tongues, good brother," replied Agnes, summoning courage to meet whatever was to come; "and though I know of no subject concerning myself that I could wish concealed from the world, yet I will bid these poor girls go at your desire. Go, Blanche," she continued, turning to her principal attendant—"go, and wait in the ante-room till I call. Now, good brother, may I crave what can be your business with so unimportant a person as my poor self?"

"As far, Madam," replied Guerin, after a moment's pause, "as the weal of this great realm of France is concerned, you are certainly anything but an unimportant person; nor can a fair, a noble, and a virtuous lady ever be unimportant, be she queen or not. My brother Bernard, from whom that most excellent knight and king, your royal husband, has, as doubtless you know, lady, received many sage and prudent counsels, has consented to join himself to me for the bold purpose of laying before you a clear view of the state of this realm, risking thereby, we know, to hurt your feelings, and even to offend our lord the King, who has anxiously kept it concealed from you."

"Hold, fair brother!" said Agnes, mildly, but firmly; "and before you proceed, mark me well! Where the good of my noble Philip, or of his kingdom of France, may be obtained by the worst pain you can inflict on me, let no fear of hurting my feelings stop you in your course. Agnes gives you leave to hurt Agnes, for her husband's good; but where, in the slightest degree, the confidence you would place in me is in opposition to the will of Philip, your King and mine, the Queen commands you to be silent. Stay, good brother, hear me out: I know that you would say, it is for the King's ultimate good, though he may disapprove of it at present; but to me, good bishop, and you, father hermit,—to me, my husband's wisdom is supreme, as his will to me is law; and though I will listen to your counsel and advice with all humility, yet you must tell me nothing that my lord would not have me hear, for on his judgment alone will I depend."

Guerin looked to the hermit, who instantly replied:—

"Daughter, you have spoken well, wisely, and nobly; and I, even I, marvel not,—though my heart is like a branch long broken from its stem, withered and verdureless,—that Philip of France clings so fondly to one, where beauty, and wisdom, and love are so strangely united: strangely indeed for this world! where, if any two of such qualities meet, 'tis but as that eastern plant which blossoms only once an age. Let us to council then, my child, and see what best may be done to save the realm from all the horrors that menace it."

The hermit spoke in a tone of such unwonted mildness, that Guerin, apparently doubting his firmness in executing the purpose that had brought them thither, took up the discourse.

"Lady," said he, "after the ungrateful occurrence which terminated the tournament of the Champeaux,—forgive me, that I recal what must pain you,—you can hardly doubt that our holy father the pope, in his saintly wisdom, considers that the decree of the prelates of France, annulling the marriage of the King with Ingerburge of Denmark, was illegal, and consequently invalid. Need I—need I, lady, urge upon you the consequences, if our royal lord persists in neglecting, or resisting, the repeated commands of the supreme pontiff?"

Agnes turned deadly pale, and pointed to a crystal cup filled with water, which stood near. The minister gave it to her; and, having drunk a few drops, she covered her eyes with her hand for a moment—then raised them, and replied with less apparent emotion than might have been expected: "You do not clothe the truth, sir, in that soft guise which makes it less terrible of aspect to a weak woman's eyes, though not less certain; but you have been a soldier, sir, and also a recluse, mingling not with such feeble things as we are; and, therefore, I must forgive you the hard verities you speak. What is it you wish me to do?—for I gather from your manner that there is some task you would fain impose upon me."

Pained by the effect his words had had upon the Queen, and feeling uncertain of how far he might venture, without driving her to actual despair, embarrassed also by his small habits of intercourse with women, Guerin turned once more to the hermit.

"The task, my child," said the old man, in compliance with the minister's look, "is indeed a painful one—bitterly painful; but, if it approaches to the agony of martyrdom, it is by its self-devotion equally sublime and glorious. Think, daughter, what a name would that woman gain in history, who, to save her husband's realm from civil war and interdict, and himself from excommunication and anathema, should voluntarily take upon herself the hard duty of opposing not only his inclinations, but also her own; should tear herself from all that was dear to her, and thereby restore him to his glory and himself,—his realm to peace,—and tranquillity to the bosom of the church? Think what a name she would gain in history, and what such a sacrifice might merit from Heaven!"

"Stay! stay! father," said Agnes, raising her hand. "Stay,—let me think;" and casting down her beautiful eyes, she remained for a few moments in profound thought. After a short pause, Guerin, lest the impression should subside, attempted to fortify the hermit's arguments with his own; but the Queen waved her hand for silence, thought again, and then raising her eyes, she replied:—

"I understand you, father; and, from my heart, I believe you seek the good of my husband the King. But this thing must not be—it cannot be!"

"It is painful, lady," said Guerin; "but to a mind like yours,—to a heart that loves your husband better than yourself——"

"Hold, my good brother!" said Agnes. "I, a weak, unwise woman, am ill fitted to contend with two wise and learned men like you; and therefore I will at once tell you why I reject a task that no consideration of my own feelings would have caused me to refuse;—no, not had it slain me!" she added, raising her eyes to heaven, as if appealing there for testimony of the truth of her assertion. "In the first place, I am the wife of Philip, King of France; and my lips shall never do my fame the dishonour to admit that for an instant I have been aught else, since his hand clasped mine before the altar of St. Denis, in presence of all the prelates and bishops of his realm. I should dishonour myself—I should dishonour my child, did I think otherwise. As his wife, I am bound never to quit him with my good-will; and to submit myself in all things to his judgment and his wisdom. His wisdom then must be the judge; I will in no one thing oppose it. If, but in the slightest degree, I see he begins to think the sacrifice of our domestic happiness necessary to the public weal, I will yield without resistance, and bear my sorrows alone to the grave that will soon overtake me; but never till that grave has closed upon me, will I admit that there is another Queen of France; never will I acknowledge that I am not the lawful wife of Philip Augustus; nor ever will I oppose myself to my husband's will, or arrogate to myself the right of judging where he himself has decided. No! Philip has formed his own determination from his own strong mind; and far be it from me, his wife, by a word to shake his resolution, or by a thought to impeach his judgment!"

The Queen spoke calmly, but decidedly; and though no tone in her voice betrayed any degree of vehemence, yet the bright light of her eye, and the alternate flushing and paleness of her cheek, seemed to evince a far more powerful struggle of feelings within, than she suffered to appear in her language.

"But hear me, lady,—hear me once more, for all our sakes!" exclaimed Guerin.

"Sir, I can listen no longer!" said Agnes, rising from her seat, with a degree of energy and dignity, that her slight form and gentle disposition seemed incapable of displaying. "My resolution is taken—my course is fixed—my path is made; and nothing on earth shall turn me therefrom. The icy mountains of my native land," she continued, pointing with her hand in the direction, as she fancied, of the Tyrol, "whose heads have stood for immemorial ages, beaten in vain by storm and tempest, are not more immoveable than I am. But I am not well," she added, turning somewhat pale—"I pray you, good sirs, leave me!"

Guerin bowed his head, yet lingered, saying, "And yet I would fain——"

"I am not well, sir," said the Queen, turning paler and paler. "Send me my women, I beseech you!"

Guerin made a step towards the door, but suddenly turned, just in time to catch the beautiful princess in his arms, as, overcome by excitement and distress of mind, she fell back in one of those deathlike fainting fits which had seized her first at the Champeaux.

Her women were immediately called to her assistance; and the minister and the hermit retired, disappointed indeed in the purpose they had proposed to effect, but hardly less admiring the mingled dignity, gentleness, and firmness with which the Queen had conducted herself in one of the most painful situations wherein ever a good and virtuous woman was placed on earth.

"And now, what more can be done?" said Guerin, pausing on the last step of the staircase, and speaking in a tone that implied abandonment of farther effort rather than expectation of counsel. "What can be done?"

"Nothing, my son," replied the hermit,—"nothing, without thou wouldst again visit yon fair, unhappy girl, to torture her soul without shaking her purpose. For me, I have no call to wring my fellow-creatures' hearts; and therefore I meddle herein no more. Fare thee well! I go to De Coucy Magny, as they call it, to see a wild youth whose life I saved, I fear me, to little purpose."

"But not on foot!" said Guerin; "'tis far, good brother. Take a horse, a mule, from my stable, I pray thee!"

"And why not on foot?" asked the old man. "Our Lord and Saviour walked on foot, I trow; and he might have well been prouder than thou or I."

CHAPTER XV.

The woods of De Coucy Magny stretched far over hill, and dale, and plain, where now not the root of one ancient tree is to be seen; and many a vineyard, and a corn field, and a meadow are to-day spread out in the open sunshine, which were then covered with deep and tangled underwood, or shaded by the broad arms of vast primeval oaks.

Two straight roads passed through the forest; and a multitude of smaller paths, which, winding about in every different direction, crossing and recrossing each other,—now avoiding the edge of a pond and making a large circuit, now taking advantage of a savannah, to proceed straight forward, and now turning sharp round the vast boll of some antique tree,—formed altogether an absolute labyrinth, through which it needed a very certain clue, or very long experience, to proceed in safety.

These paths, also, however multiplied and intersected, left between them many a wide unbroken space of forest ground, where apparently the foot of man had never trod, nor axe of woodman ever rung, the only tracks through which seemed to be some slight breaks in the underwood, where the rushing sides of a boar or a deer had dashed the foliage away. Many of these spaces were of the extent of several thousand acres: and if the very intricacy of the general forest paths themselves would not have afforded shelter and concealment to men who, like the cotereaux and routiers, as much needed a well-hidden lair as ever did the wildest savage of the wood, such asylum was easily to be found in the dark recesses of these inviolate wilds.

Here, on a bright morning of July, when the grey of the sky was just beginning to warm with the rising day, a single man, armed with sword, corslet, and steel bonnet, all shining with the last polishing touch which they had received at the shop of the armourer, took his way alone down one of the narrowest paths of the forest. In his hand he held an *arbalète,** or cross-bow, then a very late invention; and, by the careful manner in which he examined every bush as he passed, he seemed some huntsman tracing step by step, the path of a deer.

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* Guillaume le Breton says unqualifiedly, that Richard Cœur de Lion invented the *arbalète*, or cross-bow. Brompton, on the other hand, only declares that he revived the use of it, "hoc genus sagittandi in usum revocavit."

"Cursed be the fools!" muttered he to himself; "they have not taken care to mark the *brisé* well; and in this strange forest, how am I to track them? Ah, here is another!" and passing on from tree to tree, he at length paused where one of the smaller branches, broken across, hung with its leaves just beginning to wither from the interruption of the sap. Here, turning from the direct path, he pushed his way through the foliage, stooping his head to prevent the branches striking him in the face, but still taking pains to remark at every step each tree or bush that he passed; and wherever he perceived a broken branch, keeping it to his right hand as he proceeded. His eyes, nevertheless, were now and then turned to the left, as well as the right; and at length, after he had advanced about four hundred yards in this cautious manner, he found the boughs broken all around, so that the *brisé,* as he called it, terminated there; and all guide by which to direct his course seemed at an end.

At this place he paused; and, after examining more scrupulously every object in the neighbourhood, he uttered a long whistle, which, after a moment or two, met with a reply, but from such a distance that it was scarcely audible. The cross-bowman whistled again; and the former sound was repeated, but evidently nearer. Then came a slight rustling in the bushes, as if some large body stirred the foliage, and then for a moment all was still.

"Ha, Jodelle!" cried a voice at last, from the other side of the bushes, "is it you?" and pushing through the leaves, which had concealed him while he paused to examine the stranger we have described, a genuine routier, if one might judge by his very rude and rusty arms, entered the little open space in which the other had been waiting. He had an unbent bow in his hand, and a store of arrows in his belt, which was garnished still farther with a strong short sword, and of knives and daggers not a few, from the *miséricorde* of a hand's breadth long, to the thigh knife of a peasant of those days, whose blade of nearly two feet in length rendered it a serviceable and tremendous weapon.

He had on his back, by way of clothing, a light iron hauberk, which certainly shone not brightly; nor possibly was it desirable for him that it should. Though of somewhat more solid materials than a linen gown, it had more than one rent in it, where the rings had either been broken by a blow, or worn through by age: but, in these places, the deficient links had been supplied by cord, which at all events kept the yawning mouths of the gaps together. On his head was placed an iron hat, as it was called, much in the shape of the famous helmet of Mambrino, as described by Cervantes; and round about it were twined several branches of oak, which rendered his head, when seen through the boughs, scarce distinguishable from the leaves themselves; while his rugged and dingy hauberk might well pass for a part of the trunk of one of the trees.

"Well met! well met, Jodelle!" cried he, as the other approached. "Come to the halting place. We have waited for you long, and had scanty fare. But say, what have you done? have you slit the devil's weasand, or got the knight's purse? Do you bring us good news or bad? Do you come gay or sorry? Tell me! tell me, Jodelle! Thou art our leader, but must not lead us to hell with thy new-fashioned ways."

"Get thee on to the halt," replied Jodelle; "I will tell all there."

The two cotereaux—for such they were—now made their way through the trees and shrubs, to a spot where the axe had been busily plied to clear away about half an acre of ground, round which were placed a range of huts, formed of branches, leaves, and mud, capable of containing perhaps two or three hundred men.

In the open space in the centre, several personages of the same respectable class as the two we have already introduced to the reader, were engaged in various athletic sports—pitching an immense stone, shooting at a butt, or striking downright blows at a log of wood, to see who could hew into its substance most profoundly.

Others again were scattered about, fashioning bows out of strong beechen poles, pointing arrows and spears, or sharpening their knives and swords; while one or two lay listlessly looking on, seemingly little inclined to employ very actively either their mental or corporeal faculties.

The arrival of Jodelle, as he was called, put a stop to the sports, and caused a momentary bustle amongst the whole party, the principal members of which seemed to recognise in him one of the most distinguished of their fraternity, although some of those present gazed on him as a stranger.

"Welcome, welcome, Sire Jodelle!" cried one who had been fashioning a bow. "By my faith! we have much needed thy presence. We are here at poor quarters. Not half so good as we had in the mountains of Auvergne, till that bad day's work we made of it between the Allier and the Puy; and a hundred thousand times worse than when we served the merry King of England under that bold knight, Mercader. Oh, the quarrel of that cross-bow at Chaluz was the worst shaft ever was shot for us. Those days will never come again."

"They may, they may!" replied Jodelle, "and before we dream of,—for good, hard wars are spoken of; and then the detested cotereaux grow, with these good kings, into their faithful troops of Brabançois,—their excellent free companions! But we shall see. In the meantime, tell me where is Jean le Borgne?"

"He is gone with a party to look for some rich Jews, going to Rouen," replied the person who had spoken before. "But we have plenty of men here for any bold stroke, if there be one in the market; and beside——"

"Did you meet with Captain Vanswelder?" interrupted Jodelle. "The fools at the castle believe he has two thousand bows with him. Where does he lie? How many has he?"

"He never had above four hundred," replied another of the many cotereaux who by this time had gathered round Jodelle; "and when your men came—if you are the captain, Jodelle,—he took such of us as would go with him down to Normandy, to offer himself to the bad King John, for half the sum of crowns we had before. Now, fifty of us, who had served King Richard, and value our honour, agreed not to undersell ourselves after such a fashion as that; so we joined ourselves to your men, to take the chance of the road."

"You did wisely and honourably," replied Jodelle; "but nevertheless you would have been very likely to get hanged or roasted for your pains, if I had not, by chance, stuck myself to the skirts of that Guy de Coucy, who is now at his château hard by, menacing fire and sword to every man of us that he finds in his woods. By St. Macrobius! I believe the mad-headed boy would have attacked Vanswelder and his whole troop with the few swords he can muster, which do not amount to fifty. A brave youth he is, as ever lived:—pity 'tis he must die! And yet when he dashed out my brother's brains with his battle-axe, I vowed to God and St. Nicholas that I would fall myself or slay him, as well as that treacherous slave who betrayed us into attacking a band of men-at-arms instead of a company of pilgrims. It is a firm vow, and must be kept."

"And yet, good master Jodelle, thou hast been somewhat slow in putting it in execution," said one of the cotereaux. "Here thou and Gerard Pons have been near a month with him—and yet, from all that I can divine, thou hast neither laid thy finger on master or man!"

"Ha! sir fool, wouldst thou have done it better?" demanded Jodelle, turning on the speaker fiercely. "If I slew the fool juggler first, which were easy to do, never should I get a stroke at his lord; and, let me tell thee, 'tis no such easy matter to reach the master, who has never doffed his steel hauberk since I have seen him—except when he sleeps, and then a varlet and a page lie across his door—a privilege which he gave them in the Holy Land, where they saved his life from a raw Saracen; and now, the fools hold it as such an honour, they would not yield it for a golden ring. Besides," he added, grinning with a mixture of shrewd malevolence and self-conceit in his countenance, "I have a plot in my head. You know, I bear a brain."

"Yes, yes!" replied several; "we know thou art rare at a plot. What goes forward now?—I vow a wax-candle to the Virgin Mary if it be a good plot, and succeeds," added one of them. But this liberality towards the Virgin, unhappily for the priests, met with no imitators.

"My plot," replied Jodelle, "is as good a plot as ever was laid—ay, or hatched either—and will succeed too. Wars are coming on thick. We have no commander since our quarrel with Mercader. This De Coucy has no men. To the wars he must and will; and surely would rather be followed by a stout band of free companions, than have his banner fluttering at the head of half-a-dozen varlets, like a red rag on a furze bush. I will find means to put it in his head, and means to bring about that you shall be the men. Then shall he lead us to spoil and plunder enough, and leave it all to us when he has got it—for his hand is as free as his heart is bold. My vow will stand over till the war is done; and then the means of executing it will be in my own hands. What say you?"

"A good plot!—an excellent good plot!" cried several of the cotereaux; but nevertheless, though plunged deep in blood and crime, there were many of the band who knit their brow, and turned down the corner of the mouth, at the profound piece of villany with which Master Jodelle finished his proposal. This did not prevent them from consenting, however; and Jodelle proceeded to make various arrangements for disposing comfortably of the band, during the space of time which was necessarily to elapse before his plan could be put in execution.

The first thing to be done was to evacuate the woods of De Coucy Magny, that no unpleasant collision might take place between the cotereaux and De Coucy; and the next consideration was, where the band was to lie till something more should be decided. This difficulty was soon set aside, by one of the troop which had been originally in possession of the forest, proposing as a refuge some woods in the neighbourhood, which they had haunted previous to betaking themselves to their present refuge. They then agreed to divide into two separate bands, and to confine their system of plundering as much as possible to the carrying off of horses; so that no difficulty might be found in mounting the troop, in case of the young knight accepting their services.

"And now," cried Jodelle, "how many are you, when all are here?"

"One hundred and thirty-three," was the reply.

"Try to make up three fifties," said Jodelle, "and, in the first place, decamp with all speed; for this very day, De Coucy, with all the horsemen he can muster, will be pricking through every brake in the forest. Carry off all your goods—unroof the huts—and if there be a clerk amongst you, let him write me a scroll, and leave it on the place, to say you quit it, all for the great name of De Coucy. So shall his vanity be tickled."

"Oh! there's Jeremy the Monk can both read and write, you know," cried several; "and as for parchment, he shall write upon the linen that was in the pedlar's pack."

"And now," cried Jodelle, "to the work! But first show me where haunt the deer, for I must take back a buck to the castle to excuse my absence."

With very little trouble a fine herd was found, just cropping the morning grass; and Jodelle instantly brought down a choice buck with a quarrel from his cross-bow. He then bade adieu to his companions, and casting the carcass over his shoulders, he took his way back to the castle.

It may be almost needless here to say, that this very respectable personage, calling himself Jodelle, was one of the two men who had been received into De Coucy's service in Auvergne, for the purpose of leading to Paris two beautiful Arabian horses he had brought from Palestine. His objects in joining the young knight at all, and for fixing himself in his train more particularly afterwards, having been already explained by himself, we shall not notice them; but shall only remark, that personal revenge being in those days inculcated even as a virtue, it was a virtue not at all likely to be so confined to the better classes, as not to ornament in a high degree persons of Jodelle's station and profession.

The gates of the castle were open, and De Coucy himself standing on the drawbridge, as the coterel returned.

"Ha! varlet," said he. "Where hast thou been without the gates so early? I must have none here that stray forth when they may be needed!"

"I had nought to do, beau sire," replied Jodelle, "and went but to strike a buck in the wood, that your board might show some venison:—I have not been long, though it led me farther than I thought."

"Ha! canst thou wing a shaft or a quarrel well?" demanded De Coucy. "Thou hast brought down, indeed, a noble buck, and hit him fair in the throat. What distance was your shot?"

"A hundred and twenty yards," answered the coterel; "and if I hit not a Normandy pippin at the same, may my bowstring be cut by your mad fool, sir knight!"

"By the blessed saints!" cried De Coucy, "thou shalt try this very day at a better mark: for thou shalt have a coterel's head within fifty steps, before yon same sun, that has just risen, goes down over the wood!"

"The poor cotereaux!" cried Jodelle, affecting a look of compassion. "They are hunted from place to place, like wild beasts; and yet there is many a good soldier amongst them, after all."

"Out, fellow!" cried the knight. "Speakest thou for plunderers and common thieves?"

"Nay, beau sire! I speak not for them," replied Jodelle.

"Yet what can the poor devils do? Here, in time of war, they spend their blood and their labour in the cause of one or other of the parties; and then, the moment they are of no further use, they are cast off like a mail-shirt after a battle. They have no means of living but by their swords; and when no one will employ them, what can they do? What could I have done myself, beau sire, if your noble valour had not induced you to take me into your train? All the money I had got in the wars was spent; and I must have turned routier, or starved."

"But would you say, fellow, that you have been a coterel?" demanded De Coucy, eyeing him from head to foot, as a man might be supposed to do on finding himself unexpectedly in company with a wolf, and discovering that it was a much more civilized sort of animal than he expected.

"I will not deny, beau sire," replied Jodelle, "that I once commanded two hundred as good free lances as ever served King Richard."

"Where are they now?" demanded De Coucy, with some degree of growing interest in the man to whom he spoke. "Are they dispersed? What has become of them?"

"I do not well know, beau sire," replied the coterel. "When Peter Gourdun's arblast sent Richard, the lion-hearted, on the same long, dark journey that he had given to so many others himself, I quarrelled with Count Mercader, under whom I served. Richard, with his dying breath, as you have doubtless heard, fair sir, ordered the man Gourdun, who had killed him, to be spared and set free; and Mercader promised to obey: but, no sooner was King Richard as cold as King Pepin, than Mercader had Gourdun tied hand and foot to the harrow of the drawbridge of Chaluz, and saw him skinned alive with his own eyes."

"Cruel villain!" cried De Coucy.

"Ah! fair knight," rejoined the coterel. "I ventured to say that he was disobedient as a soldier, as well as cruel as a knight; and that he ought to have obeyed the King's commands, just as much after he was dead, as if he had lived to see them obeyed. What will you have? There were plenty to tell Mercader what I said:—there were high words followed; and I left the camp as soon as peace was trumpeted. I had saved some money, and hoped to buy a hauberk feof under some noble lord; but as evil fortune would have it, I met with a *menestrandie,* consisting of the chief *menestrel,* and four or five jongleurs and glee-maidens:

and never did they leave me till all I had was nearly gone: what lasted, kept me a year at Besançon; after which I was glad to engage myself for hire, to ride your horses from Vic le Comte to Paris."

"But your troop!" said De Coucy. "Have you never heard any news of your men?"

"I have heard through one of the minstrels," said the coterel, "that soon after I was gone, they repented, and would not take service with King John, as they had at first proposed; but came to offer themselves to the noble King Philip of France, who, however, being at peace, would not entertain them; and that they are now roaming about, seeking some noble baron who will give them protection, and lead them where they may gain both money and a good name."

"By the rood! they want the last, perhaps, more than the first," replied De Coucy, turning to enter the château.

The coterel's brow darkened, and he set his teeth hard, feeling the head of his dagger as he followed the knight, as if his hand itched to draw it and strike De Coucy from behind; which indeed he might easily have done, and with fatal effect, at the spot where the hauberk ending, left his throat and collar bare.

It is not improbable that Jodelle would have yielded without hesitation to the temptation of opportunity, especially as his escape over the drawbridge into the wood might have been effected in an instant; but he saw clearly that his words had made an impression upon the knight. For the moment, indeed, they seemed to produce no determinate result, yet it was evident that whenever he found a fitting opportunity, it would be easy to re-awaken the ideas to which he had already given birth, and, by suggesting a very slight link of connexion, cause De Coucy to make the application to himself.

One reason, perhaps, why very prudent men are often not so successful as rash ones, may be that, even in the moment of consideration, opportunity is lost. While the coterel still held his hand upon his dagger, De Coucy's squire, Hugo de Barre, approached to tell the young châtelain that his seven vassals—the poor remains of hundreds—were very willing to ride against the cotereaux, though such was no part of their actual tenure: and that, as soon as they could don their armour and saddle their horses, they would be up at the castle. They promised also to bring with them all the armed men they could get to aid them, in the towns and villages in the neighbourhood, not one of which had escaped without paying some tribute to the dangerous tenants of the young knight's woods.

In little less than an hour, De Coucy found himself at the head of near one hundred men; and, confident in his own powers both of mind and body, he waited not for many others that were still hastening to join him; but, giving his banner to the wind, set forth to attack the banditti, in whatever numbers he might find them.

It were uninteresting to detail all the measures that De Coucy took to ensure that no part of the forests should remain unsearched; especially as we already know, that his perquisitions were destined to be fruitless. Nor is it necessary to dwell upon the means that the coterel employed to draw the young knight and his followers, without seeming to do so, towards the spot which his companions had so lately evacuated.

De Coucy by nature was not suspicious; but yet his eye very naturally strayed, from time to time, to the face of Jodelle, whose fellow feeling for the cotereaux had been so openly expressed in the morning; and, as they approached the former halting-place of the freebooters, he remarked somewhat of a smile upon his lips.

"Ha!" said he, in an under voice, at the same time turning his horse and riding up to him. "What means that smile, sir Brabançois?"

Jodelle's reply was ready. "It means, sir knight, that I *can* help you, and I *will;* for even were these my best friends, the laws by which we are ruled bind me to render you all service against them, on having engaged with you.—Do you see that broken bough? Be you sure it means something. The men you seek for are not far off."

"So, my good friend," said De Coucy, "methinks you must have exercised the trade of Brabançois in the green wood, as well as in the tented field, to know so well all the secret signs of these gentry's hiding places."

"I have laid many an ambush in the green wood," replied Jodille, undauntedly; "and the signs that have served me for that may well lead me to trace others."

"Here are foot-marks, both of horse and foot," cried Hugo de Barre, "and lately trodden too, for scarce a fold of the moss has risen since."

"Coming or going?" asked De Coucy, spurring up to the spot.

"Both my lord," answered the squire. "Here are hoof marks all ways."

Without wasting time in endeavouring to ascertain which traces were the last imprinted, De Coucy took such precautions as the scantiness of his followers permitted for ensuring that the cotereaux did not make their escape by some other outlets; and then boldly plunged in on horseback, following through the bushes, as well as he could, the marks which the band had left behind them when they decamped. He was not long in making his way to the open space, surrounded with huts, which we have before described. The state of the whole scene at once showed that it had been but lately abandoned; though the unroofing of the hovels evinced that its former tenants entertained no thought of making it any more their dwelling-place.

In the centre of the opening, however, stood the staff of a lance, on the end of which was fixed a scroll of parchment, written in very fair characters to the following effect:—

"Sire De Coucy! hearing of your return to your lands, we leave them willingly—not because we fear you, or any man, but because we respect your knightly prowess, and would not willingly stand in deadly fight against one of the best knights in France."

"By St. Jerome! the knaves are not without their courtesy!" exclaimed De Coucy. "Well, now they are off my land, God speed them!"

"Where the devil did they get the parchment?" muttered Jodelle to himself:—and thus ended the expedition, with two exclamations that did not slightly mark the age.

CHAPTER XVI.

THERE are no truer cameleons than words, changing hue and aspect as the circumstances change around them, and leaving scarce a shade of their original meaning. *Piety* has at present many acceptations, according to the various lips that pronounce it, and the ears that hear; but in the time of the Commonwealth, it meant the grossest fanaticism; and in the time of Philip Augustus, the grossest superstition.

An age where knowledge and civilization have made some progress, yet have not produced a cold fondness for abstract facts, may be called the period of imagination in a nation; and then it will generally be found that, in matters of religion, a brooding, a melancholy, and a fanatical spirit reigns. Sectarian enthusiasm is then sufficient to keep itself alive in each man's breast, without imagination requiring any aid from external stimulants; and though the language of the pulpit may be flowery and extravagant, the manners are rigid and austere, and the rights simple and unadorned.

In more remote periods, however, where brutal ignorance is the general character of society, the only means of communicating with the dull imagination of the people is by their outward senses. Pomp, pageant, and display, music and ceremony, accompany each rite of the church, to give it dignity in the eyes of the multitude, who, if they do not understand the spirit, at least worship the form. Such was the case in the days of Philip Augustus. The people, with very few exceptions,—barons, knights, serfs, and ecclesiastics,—beheld, felt, and understood little else in religion than the ceremonies of the church of Rome. Each festival of that church was for them a day of rejoicing; each saint was an object of the most profound devotion: and each genuflexion of the priest (though the priest himself was often bitterly satirised in the sirventes of the trouvères and troubadours) was a sacred rite, that the populace would not have seen abrogated for the world. The ceremonies of the church were the link—the only remaining link—between the noble and the serf; and, common to all,—the high, the low, the rich, the poor,—they were revered and loved by all classes of the community.

Such was the general state of France, in regard to religious feelings, when the kingdom was menaced with interdict by Pope Innocent the Third. The very rumour cast a gloom over the whole nation; but when the legate, proceeding according to the rigid injunctions of the pope, called the bishops, archbishops, and abbots of France to a council at Dijon, for the purpose of putting the threat in execution, murmurs and lamentations burst forth all over France.

Philip Augustus, however, remained inflexible in his resolution of resistance; and, though he sent two messengers to protest against the proceedings of the council, he calmly suffered its deliberations to proceed, without a change of purpose. The pope was equally unmoved; and the Cardinal of St. Mary's proceeded to the painful task which had been imposed upon him; declaring to the assembled bishops the will of the sovereign pontiff, and calling upon them to name the day themselves on which the interdict should be pronounced. The bishops and abbots found all opposition in vain, and the day was consequently named.

It was about this period that Count Thibalt d'Auvergne, having laid the ashes of his father in the grave, prepared to retrace his steps to Paris. His burden upon earth was a heavy one; yet, like the overloaded camel in the desert, he resolutely bore it on without murmur or complaint, waiting till he should drop down underneath it, and death should give him relief. A fresh furrow might be traced on his brow, a deeper shade of stern melancholy in his eye; but that was all by which one might guess how painfully he felt the loss of what he looked on as his last tie to earth. His voice was calm and firm, his manner clear and collected: nothing escaped his remembrance; nothing indicated that his thoughts were not wholly in the world wherein he stood, except the fixed contraction of his brow, and the sunshine-less coldness of his lips.

When, as we have before said, he had given his power, as suzerain of Auvergne, into the hands of his uncle, he himself mounted his horse, and, followed by a numerous retinue, set out from Vic le Comte.

He turned not, however, his steps towards Paris in the first instance, but proceeded direct to Dijon. Here he found no small difficulty in obtaining a lodging for himself and train: the monasteries, on whose hospitality he had reckoned, being completely occupied by the great influx of prelates, which the council had brought thither; and the houses of public entertainment being, in that day, unmeet dwellings for persons of his rank. Nevertheless, dispersing his followers through the town, with commands to keep his name secret, the Count d'Auvergne took up his abode at the house of a *tavernier*, or vintner, and proceeded to make the inquiries which had caused him so far to deviate from his direct road.

These referred entirely to—and he had long before determined to make them—the property of the Count de Tankerville; on which, however, he soon found that King Philip had laid his hands; and therefore, the story of Gallon the fool being confirmed in this point, he gave up all farther questions upon the subject, as not likely to produce any benefit to his friend De Coucy.

Occupied as he had been in Auvergne, the progress of the council of bishops had reached his ears but vaguely; and he determined that the very next day he would satisfy himself in regard to its deliberations, which, though indeed they could take no atom from the load on his heart, nor restore one drop of happiness to his cup, yet interested him, perhaps, as much as any human being in France.

The day had worn away in his other inquiries, the evening had passed in bitter thoughts, and midnight had come, without bringing even the hope of sleep to his eyelids; when suddenly he was startled by hearing the bells of all the churches in Dijon toll, as for the dead. Immediately rising, he threw his cloak about him, and drawing the hood over his head and face, proceeded into the street to ascertain whether the fears which those sounds had excited in his bosom were well founded.

In the street he found a multitude of persons flocking towards the cathedral; and, hurrying on with the rest, he entered at one of the side-doors, and crossed to the centre of the nave.

The sight that presented itself was certainly awful. No tapers were lighted at the high altar; not a shrine gave forth a single ray; but on the steps before the table stood the cardinal legate, dressed in the deep purple stole worn by those of his dignity on the days of solemn fast in the church of Rome. On either hand, the steps, and part of the choir, were crowded with bishops and mitred abbots, each in the solemn habiliments appointed by his order for the funeral fasts, and each holding in his hand a black and smoky torch of pitch, which spread through the whole church their ungrateful odour and their red and baleful glare. The space behind the altar was crowded with ecclesiastics and monks, on the upper part of whose pale and meagre faces the dim and ill-favouring torch-light cast an almost unearthly gleam; while streaming down the centre of the church, over the kneeling congregation, on whose dark vestments it seemed to have no effect, the red light spread through the nave and aisles, catching faintly on the tall pillars and Gothic tracery of the cathedral, and losing itself, at last, in the deep gloom all around.

The choir of the cathedral were in the act of singing the *Miserere* as the Count d'Auvergne entered; and the deep and solemn notes of the chant, echoed by the vaulted roofs, and long aisles, and galleries, while it harmonized well with the gloominess of the scene, offered frightful discord when the deep toll of the death-bell broke across. No longer doubting that his apprehensions were indeed true, and that the legate was about to pronounce the realm in interdict, Thibalt d'Auvergne advanced as far as he could towards the choir, and, placing himself by one of the pillars, prepared, with strange and mingled emotions, to hear the stern thunder of the church launched at two beings whose love had made his misery, and whose happiness was built upon his disappointment.

It were too cruel an inquest of human nature to ask if, at the thought of Agnes de Meranie being torn from the arms of her royal lover, a partial gleam of undefined satisfaction did not thrill through the heart of the Count d'Auvergne; but this at least is certain, that could he, by laying down his life, have swept away the obstacles between them, and removed the agonising difficulties of Agnes' situation, Thibalt d'Auvergne would not have hesitated—no, not for a moment!

At the end of the *Miserere*, the legate advanced, and in a voice that trembled even at the sentence it pronounced, placed the whole realm of France in interdict, — bidding the doors of the churches to be closed; the images of the saints, and the cross itself, to be veiled; the worship of the Almighty to be suspended; marriage to the young, the eucharist to the old and dying, and sepulture to the dead, to be refused; all the rites, the ceremonies, and the consolations of religion to be denied to every one; and France to be as a dead land, till such time as Philip the King should separate himself from Agnes his concubine, and take again to his bosom Ingerburge, his lawful wife.

At that hard word, concubine, applied to Agnes de Meranie, the Count d'Auvergne's hand naturally grasped his dagger; but the legate was secure in his sacred character: and he proceeded to anathematise and excommunicate Philip, according to the terrible form of the church of Rome, calling down upon his head the curses of all the powers of Heaven!

"May he be cursed in the city, and in the field, and in the highway! in living, and in dying!" said the legate; "cursed be his children, and his flocks, and his *domaines!* Let no man call him brother, or give him the kiss of peace! Let no priest pray for him, or admit him to God's altar! Let all men flee from him living, and let consolation and hope abandon his death-bed! Let his corpse remain unburied, and his bones whiten in the wind! Cursed be he on earth, and under the earth! in this life, and to all eternity!"

Such was in some degree, though far short of the tremendous original, the anathema which the legate pronounced against Philip Augustus—to our ideas, unchristian, and almost blasphemous. But then, the people heard it with reverence and trembling; and even when he summed up the awful denunciation, by announcing it in the name of the Holy Trinity—of the Father—of all mercy!—of the Son—the Saviour of the world!—and of the Holy Ghost—the Lord and Giver of Life! the people, instead of starting from the impious mingling of Heaven's holiest attributes with the violent passions of man, joined the clergy in a loud and solemn *Amen!*

At the same moment, all the sounds ceased, the torches were extinguished; and in obscurity and confusion, the dismayed multitude made their way out of the cathedral.

CHAPTER XVII.

Gloom and consternation spread over the face of France:—the link seemed cut between it and the other nations of the earth. Each man appeared to stand alone: each one brooded over his new situation with a gloomy despondency. No one doubted that the curse of God was upon the land; and the daily—nay, hourly deprivation of every religious ceremony, was constantly recalling it to the imaginations of all.

The doors of the churches were shut and barred; the statues of the saints were covered with black; the crosses on the high roads were veiled. The bells which had marked the various hours of the day, calling all classes to pray to one beneficent

God, were no longer heard swinging slowly over field and plain. The serf returned from the glebe, and the lord from the wood, in gloomy silence, missing all those appointed sounds that formed the pleasant interruption to their dull toil, or duller amusements.

All old accustomed habits,—those grafts in our nature, which cannot be torn out without agony, were entirely broken through. The matin, or the vesper prayer, was no longer said; the sabbath was unmarked by its blessed distinctness; the fêtes, whether of penitence or rejoicing, were unnoticed and cold in the hideous gloom that overspread the land, resting like the dead amidst the dying.

Every hour, every moment, served to impress the awful effects of the interdict more and more deeply on the minds of men. Was a child born, a single priest, in silence and in secrecy, as if the very act were a crime, sprinkled the baptismal water on its brow. Marriage, with all its gay ceremonies and feasts, was blotted, with other happy days, from the calendar of life. The dying died in fear, without prayer or confession, as if mercy had gone by; and the dead, cast recklessly on the soil, or buried in unhallowed ground, were exposed, according to the belief of the day, to the visitation of demons and evil spirits. Even the doors of the cemeteries were closed; and the last fond commune between the living and the dead—that beautiful weakness which pours the heart out even on the cold, unanswering grave,—was struck out from the solaces of existence.

The bishops and clergy, in the immediate neighbourhood of Dijon, first began to observe the interdict; and gradually, though steadily, the same awful privation of all religious form spread itself over France. Towards the north, however, and in the neighbourhood of the capital, the ecclesiastics were more slow in putting it in execution; and long ere it had reached the borders of the Seine, many a change had taken place in the fate of Guy de Coucy.

Having ascertained that the cotereaux had really left his woods, De Coucy gave his whole thoughts to the scheme which had been proposed to him by his squire, Hugo de Barre, for surprising Sir Julian of the Mount and his fair daughter, and bringing them to his castle, without letting them know, till after their arrival, into whose hands they had fallen.

Such extravagant pieces of gallantry were very common in that age; but there are difficulties of course in all schemes; and the difficulty of the present one was, so to surprise the party, that no bloodshed or injury might ensue; for certainly, if ever there was an undertaking to which the warning against jesting with edged tools might be justly applied, it was this.

The brain, however, of Hugo de Barre, which for a great part of his life had been sterile, or at least had lain fallow, seemed to have become productive of a sudden; and he contrived a plan by which the page, who, from many a private reason of his own, was very willing to undertake the task, was to meet Sir Julian's party, disguised as a peasant, and, mingling with the retinue, to forewarn the male party of the armed train of the proposed surprisal, enjoining them, at the same time, for the honour of the masculine quality of secresy, not to reveal their purpose to the female part of the train. "For," observed Hugo de Barre, "a woman's head, as far as ever I could hear, is just like a funnel: whatever you pour into her ear, is sure to run out at her mouth."

De Coucy stayed not to controvert this ungallant position of his squire, but sent off in all haste to Gisors, for the purpose of preparing his château for the reception of such guests, as far as his scanty means would permit. His purse, however, was soon exhausted; and yet no great splendour reigned within his halls.

The air of absolute desolation, however, was done away; and, though the young knight had ever had a sort of pride in the neatness of his horse, his arms, and his dress, which perhaps amounted to foppery, he valued wealth too little himself to imagine that the lady of his love would despise him for the want of it. He could not help wishing, however, that the King had given another tournament, where, he doubted not, his lance would have served him to overthrow five or six antagonists, the ransom of whose horses and armour might have served to complete the preparations he could now only commence. It was a wish of the thirteenth century; and though perhaps not assimilating very well with our ideas at present, it was quite in harmony with the character of the times, when many a knight lived entirely by his prowess in the battle or the lists, and when the ransom of his prisoners, or of the horses and arms of his antagonists, was held the most honourable of all revenues.

As the period approached in which De Coucy had reason to believe Count Julian and his train would pass near his castle, a warder was stationed continually in the beffroy, to keep a constant watch upon the country around; and many a time would the young knight himself climb into the high tower, and gaze over the country spread out below.

Such was the position of the castle, and the predominating height of the watch-tower, that no considerable party could pass within many miles, without being seen in some part of their way. In general, the principal roads lay open beneath the eye, traced out, clear, and distinct, over the bosom of the country, as if upon a wide map: and with more eagerness and anxiety did De Coucy gaze upon the way, and track each group which he fancied might contain the form of Isadore of the Mount, than he had ever watched for Greek or Saracen. At length, one evening, as he was thus employing himself, he saw, at some distance, the dust of a cavalcade rise over the edge of a slight hill that bounded his view to the north-east. Then came a confused group of persons on horseback; and with a beating heart, De Coucy strained his eyes to see whether there were any female figures amongst the rest. Long before it was possible for him to ascertain, he had determined twenty times, both that there were, and that there were not; and changed his opinion as often. At length, however, something light seemed to be caught by the wind, and blown away to a little distance from the party, while one of the horsemen galloped out to recover it, and bring it back.

"'Tis a woman's veil!" cried De Coucy. "'Tis she! by the sword of my father!" and darting down the winding steps of the tower, whose turnings now seemed interminable, he rushed into the court, called, "To the saddle!" and springing on his horse, which stood always prepared, he led his party into the woods, and laid his ambush at the foot of the hill, within a hundred yards of the road that led to Vernon.

All this was done with the prompt activity of a soldier long accustomed to quick and harassing warfare. In a few minutes, also, the disguises, which had been prepared to render himself and his followers as like a party of cotereaux as possible, were assumed, and De Coucy waited impatiently for the arrival of the cavalcade. The moments now passed by with that limping impotence of march which they always seem to have in the eyes of expectation. For some time the knight reasoned himself into coolness, by remembering the distance at which he had seen the party, the slowness with which they were advancing, and the rapidity with which he himself had taken up his position. For the next quarter of an hour he blamed his own hastiness of disposition, and called to mind a thousand instances in which he had deceived himself in regard to time.

He then thought they must be near; and, after listening for a few minutes, advanced a little to ascertain, when suddenly the sound of a horse's feet struck on his ear, and he waited only the first sight through the branches to make the signal of attack.

A moment after, however, he beheld, to his surprise and disappointment, the figure of a stout market woman, mounted on a mare, whose feet had produced the noise which had attracted his attention, and whose passage left the road both silent and vacant once more. Another long pause succeeded, and De Coucy, now almost certain that the party he had seen must either have halted or turned from their course, sent out scouts in various directions to gain more certain information. After a short space one returned, and then another, all bringing the same news, that the roads on every side were clear; and that not the slightest sign of any large party was visible, from the highest points in the neighbourhood.

Evening was now beginning to fall; and, very sure that Count Julian would not travel during the darkness, through a country infested by plunderers of all descriptions, the young knight, disappointed and gloomy, emerged with his followers from his concealment, and once more bent his steps slowly towards his solitary hall.

"Perhaps," said he, mentally, as he pondered over his scheme and its want of success,—"perhaps I may have escaped more bitter disappointment—perchance she might have proved cold and heartless—perchance she might have loved me, yet have been torn from me;—and then, when my eye was once accustomed to see her lovely form gliding through the halls of my dwelling, how could I have afterwards brooked its desolate vacancy? When my ear had become habituated to the sound of her voice in my own home, how silent would it have seemed when she was gone! No, no—doubtless, I did but scheme myself pain. 'Tis better as it is."

While these reflections were passing in his mind, he had reached the bottom of the hill on which his castle stood, and turned his horse up the steep path. Naturally enough, as he did so, he raised his eyes to contemplate the black frowning battlements that were about to receive him once more to their stern solitude; when, to his astonishment, he beheld the flutter of a woman's dress upon the outward walls, and a gay group of youths and maidens were seen looking down upon him from his own castle.

De Coucy at first paused from mere surprise, well knowing that his own household offered nothing such as he there beheld; but the next moment, as the form of Isadore of the Mount showed itself plainly to his sight, he struck his spurs into his horse's sides, and galloped forward like lightning, eager to lay himself open to all the disappointments over which he had moralized so profoundly but a moment before.

On entering the court, he found a multitude of squires stabling their horses with all the care that promised a long stay; and, the moment after, he was accosted by old Sir Julian of the Mount himself, who informed him that, finding himself not so well as he could wish, he had come to crave his hospitality for a day's lodging, during which time he might communicate to him, he said, some important matter for his deep consideration. This last announcement was made in one of those low and solemn tones intended to convey great meaning; and, perhaps, even Sir Julian wished to imply, that his ostensible reason for visiting the castle of De Coucy was but a fine political covering, to veil the more immediate and interesting object of his coming.

"But how now, Sir Guy!" added he; "surely you have been disguising yourself! With that sack over your armour, for a *cotte d'armes*, and the elm branch twisted round your casque, you look marvellous like a coterel."

"By my faith! good Sir Julian," replied De Coucy, with his usual frankness, "I look but like what I intended, then. The truth is, hearing of your passing, I arrayed my men like cotereaux, and laid an ambush for you, intending to take you at a disadvantage, and, making you prisoner, to bring you here;

where, in all gentle courtesy, I would have entreated your stay for some few days, to force a boar and hear a lay, and forget your weightier thoughts for a short space. But, by the holy rood! I find I have made a strange mistake; for, while I went to take you, it seems you have taken my castle itself!"

"Good, good! very good!" cried Sir Julian; "but come with me, Sir Guy. Isadore has found her way to the battlements already, and is looking out at the view, which, she says, is fine. For my part, I love no fine views but politic ones.—Come, follow me.—Let me see, which is the way?—Oh, here—No, 'tis n't. —This is a marvellous strong hold, Sir Guy! Which is the way?"

Cursing Sir Julian's slow vanity, in striving to lead the way through a castle he did not know, with its lord at his side, Sir Guy de Coucy stepped forward, and, with a foot of light, mounted the narrow staircase in the wall, that led to the outer battlements.

"Stay, stay! Sir Guy!" cried the old man. "By the rood! you go so fast, 'tis impossible to follow! You young men forget we old men get short of breath; and, though our brains be somewhat stronger than yours, 'tis said, our legs are not altogether so swift."

De Coucy, obliged to curb his impatience, paused till Sir Julian came up, and then hurried forward to the spot where Isadore was gazing, or seeming to gaze, upon the prospect.

A very close observer, however, might have perceived that—though she did not turn round till the young knight was close to her—as his clanging step sounded along the battlements, a quick warm flush rose in her cheek; and when she did turn to answer his greeting, there was that sort of glow in her countenance and sparkle in her eye which, strangely in opposition with the ceremonious form of her words, would have given matter for thought to any more quick-witted person than Count Julian of the Mount.

That worthy baron, however, wholly pre-occupied with his own sublime thoughts, saw nothing to excite his surprise, but presented De Coucy to Isadore as a noble chief of cotereaux, who would fain have taken them prisoner, had they not in the first instance stormed his castle, and "manned, or rather," said Sir Julian, "womanned, his wall," and the worthy old gentleman chuckled egregiously at his own wit. "Now that we are here, however," continued Sir Julian, "he invites us to stay for a few days, to which I give a willing consent:—what say you, Isadore? You will find these woods even sweeter than those of Montmorency for your mornings' walks."

Isadore cast down her large dark eyes, as if she was afraid that the pleasure which such a proposal gave her, might shine out too apparently through a common-place answer. "Wherever you think fit to stay, my dear father," replied she, "must always be agreeable to me."

Matters being thus arranged, we shall not particularize the passing of that evening, nor indeed of the next day. Suffice it to say, that Sir Julian found a moment to propose to De Coucy to enter into the coalition which was then forming between some of the most powerful barons of France, with John, King of England, in his quality of Duke of Normandy, and Ferrand, Count of Flanders, at their head, to resist the efforts which Philip Augustus was making to recover and augment the kingly authority.

"Do not reply, Sir Guy—do not reply hastily," concluded the old knight; "I give you two more days to consider the question in all its bearings; and on the third I will take my departure for Rouen, either embracing you as a brother in our enterprise, or thanking you for your hospitality, and relying on your secresy."

De Coucy was glad to escape an immediate reply, well knowing that the only answer he could conscientiously make, would but serve to irritate his guest, and, perhaps, precipitate his departure from the castle. He therefore let the matter rest, and applied himself, as far as his limited means would admit, to entertain Sir Julian and his suite, without derogating from the hospitality of his ancestors.

The communication of feeling between the young knight and his fair Isadore made much more rapid advances than his arrangements with Sir Julian. During the journey from Auvergne to Senlis, each day's march had added something to their mutual love, and discovered it more and more to each other. It had shone out but in trifles, it is true; for Sir Julian had been constantly present, filling their ears with continual babble, to which the one was obliged to listen from filial duty, and the other from respect for her he loved. It had shone out but in trifles, but what is life but a mass of trifles, with one or two facts of graver import, scattered like jewels amidst the sea-shore sands?—and though, perhaps, it was but a momentary smile, or a casual word, a glance, a tone, a movement, that betrayed their love to each other, it was the language that deep feelings speak, and deep feelings alone can read, but which, then, expresses a world more than words can ever tell.

When Isadore arrived at De Coucy's château, there wanted but one word to tell her that she was deeply loved; and before she had been there twelve hours that word was spoken. We will therefore pass over that day,—which was a day of long, deep, sweet thought to Isadore of the Mount, and to De Coucy a day of anxious hope, with just sufficient doubt to make it hope, not joy,—and we will come at once to the morning after.

'Twas in the fine old woods, in the immediate proximity of the castle, towards that hour of the morning when young lovers may be supposed to rise, and dull guardians to slumber in their beds. It was towards five o'clock, and the spot, a very dangerous scene for any one whose heart was not iron, with some fair being near him. A deep glade of the wood, at the one end of which might be seen a single grey tower of the castle, here opened out upon the very edge of a steep descent, commanding one of those wide extensive views, over rich and smiling lands, that make the bosom glow and expand to all that is lovely. The sun was shining down from beyond the castle, chequering the grassy glade with soft shadows and bright light; and a clear small stream, that welled from a rock hard by, wound in and out amongst the roots of the trees, over a smooth gravelly bed; till, approaching the brink of the descent, it leaped over, as if in sport, and went bounding in sparkling joyousness into the rich valley below. All was in harmony—the soft air, and the birds singing their matins, and the blue sky overhead; so that hard must have been the heart indeed that did not then feel softened by the bland smiles of nature.

Wandering down the glade, side by side, even at that early hour, came De Coucy and Isadore of the Mount, alone—for the waiting-maid, Alixe, was quite sufficiently discreet to toy with every buttercup as she passed; so that the space of full a hundred yards was ever interposed between the lovers and any other human creature.

"Oh, De Coucy!" said Isadore, proceeding with a conversation, which for various reasons is here omitted, "if I could but believe that your light, gay heart were capable of preserving such deep feelings as those you speak of!"

"Indeed, indeed! and in very truth!" replied De Coucy, "my heart, sweet Isadore, is very, very different from what it seems in a gay and heartless world. I know not why, but from my youth I have ever covered my feelings from the eyes of my companions. I believe it was, at first, lest those who could not understand should laugh; and now it has become so much a habit, that often do I jest when I feel deepest, and laugh when my heart is far from merriment; and though you may have deemed that heart could never feel in any way, believe me now, when I tell you, that it has felt often and deeply."

"Nay!" said Isadore, perhaps somewhat wilful in her mistake, "if you have felt such sensations so often, and so deeply, but little can be left for me."

"Nay, nay!" cried De Coucy, eagerly. "You wrong my speech. I never loved but you. My feelings in the world, the feelings that I spoke of, have been for the sorrows and the cares of others—for the loss of friends—the breaking of fond ties—to see injustice, oppression, wrong;—to be misunderstood by those I esteemed—repelled where I would have shed my heart's blood to serve. Here, have I felt all that man can feel; but I never loved but you. I never yet saw woman, before my eyes met yours, in whose hand I could put my hope and happiness, my life and honour, my peace of mind at present, and all the fond dreams we form for the future. Isadore, do you believe me?"

She cast down her eyes for a moment, then raised them, to De Coucy's surprise, swimming with tears. "Perhaps I do," replied she.—"Do not let my tears astonish you, De Coucy," she added; "they are not at all painful ones; for to find oneself beloved as one would wish to be, is very, very sweet. But still, good friend, I see much to make us fear for the future. The old are fond of wealth, De Coucy, and they forget affection. I would not that my tongue should for a moment prove so false to my heart, as to proffer one word against my father; but, I fear me, he will look for riches in a husband to his daughter."

"And will such considerations weigh with you, Isadore?" demanded De Coucy, sadly.

"Not for a moment!" replied she. "Did I choose for myself, I would sooner, far sooner, that the man I loved should be as poor a knight as ever braced on a shield, that I might endow him with my wealth, and bring him something more worthy than this poor hand. But can I oppose my father's will, De Coucy?"

"What!" cried the knight; "and will you, Isadore, wed the first wealthy lover he chooses to propose, and yield yourself, a cold inanimate slave, to one man, while your heart is given to another?"

"Hush, hush!" cried Isadore—"never, De Coucy, never!—I will never wed any man against my father's will; so far my duty as a child compels me:—but I will never, never marry any man—but—but—what shall I say?—but one I love."

"Oh, say something more, sweet, sweet girl!" cried the young knight eagerly;—"say something more, to give my heart some firm assurance—let that promise be to me!"

"Well, well!" said Isadore, speaking quick, as if afraid the words should be stayed upon her very lip, "no one but you—Will that content you?"

De Coucy pressed her hand to his lips, and to his heart, with all that transport of gratitude that the most invaluable gift a woman can bestow deserves; and yet he pressed her to repeat her promise. He feared, he said, the many powerful arts with which friends work on a woman's mind,—the persuasions, the threats, the false reports; and he ceased not till he had won her to repeat again and again, with all the vows that could bind her heart to his, that her hand should never be given to another.

"They may cloister me in a convent," she said, as the very reiteration rendered her promise bolder, and his ardent and passionate professions made simple assurances seem cold: "but I deem not they will do it; for my father, though quick in his disposition, and immovable in what he determines, loves me, I think, too well, to part with me willingly for ever. He may threaten it; but he will not execute his threat. But oh! De Coucy, have a care that you urge him not to such a point, that he shall say my hand shall never be yours; for if once 'tis said, he will hold it a matter of honour never to retract, though he saw us both dying at his feet."

De Coucy promised to be patient, and to be circumspect, and all that lover could promise; and, engaging Isadore to sit down on a mossy seat that nature herself had formed with the roots of an old oak, he occupied the vacant minutes with all those sweet pourings forth of the heart to which love, and youth, and imagination alone dare give way, in this cold and stony world. Isadore's eyes were bent upon him, her hand lay in his, and each was fully occupied with the other, when a sort of half-scream from the waiting-maid, Alixe, woke them from their dreams: and, looking up, they found themselves in the presence of old Sir Julian of the Mount.

"Good! good! marvellous good!" cried the old knight.—"Get thee in, Isadore—without a word!—Get thee in, too, good mistress looker on!" he added, to Alixe; "'tis well thou art not a man instead of a woman, or I would curry thy hide for thee. Get thee in, I say!—I must deal with our noble host alone."

Isadore obeyed her father's commands in silence, turning an imploring look to De Coucy, as if once more to counsel patience. Alixe followed, grumbling; and the old knight, turning to De Coucy, addressed him in a tone of ironical compliment, intended to be more bitter than the most unmixed abuse.

"A thousand thanks! a thousand thanks! beau sire!" he said, "for your disinterested hospitality. Good sooth, 'twas a pity your plan for taking us prisoners did not go forward; for now you might have a fair excuse for keeping us so too. 'Twould have been an agreeable surprise to us all—to me especially; and I thank you for it. Doubtless you propose to marry my daughter without my knowledge also, and add another agreeable surprise. I thank you for that, too, beau sire!"

"You mistake me, good Sir Julian," replied De Coucy, calmly: "I did not propose to wed your daughter without your knowledge, but hoped that your consent would follow your knowledge of our love. I am not rich, but I do believe that want of wealth is the only objection you could have——"

"And enough surely," interrupted Sir Julian. "What! is that black castle, and half a hundred roods of wild wood, a match for ten thousand marks a year, which my child is heir to?—Beau sire, you do mistake. Doubtless you are very liberal, where you give away other people's property to receive yourself; but I am of a less generous disposition. Besides," he added, more coolly, "to put the matter to rest for ever, Sir Guy de Coucy, know that I have solemnly promised my daughter's hand to the noble Guillaume de la Roche Guyon."

"Promised her hand!" exclaimed De Coucy, "to Guillaume de la Roche Guyon! Dissembling traitor! By the holy rood! he shall undergo my challenge, and die for his cold treachery!"

"Mark me! mark me! I pray you, beau sire!" cried Sir Julian of the Mount, in the same cool tone. "Should Guillaume de la Roche Guyon fall under your lance, you shall never have my child—so help me, Heaven!—except with my curse upon her head. Ay! and even were he to die or fall in the wars that are coming—for I give her not to him till they be passed—you should not have her then—without," he added, with a sneer, "I was your prisoner chained hand and foot; and you could offer me acre with acre for my own land. But perhaps you still intend to keep me prisoner, here in your stronghold? Such things have been done, I know."

"They will never be done by me, Count Julian," replied De Coucy, "though it is with pain I see you go, and would fain persuade you to stay, and think better of my suit; yet my drawbridge shall fall at your command, as readily as at my own. Yet, let me beseech you to think. I would not boast;—but still let me say, my name and deeds are not unknown in the world. The wealth that once my race possessed has not been squandered in feasting and revelry, but in the wars of the blessed Cross, in the service of religion and honour. As to this Guillaume de la Roche Guyon, I will undertake within a brief space to bring his formal renunciation of your promise."

"It cannot be, sir!—it cannot be!" interrupted Sir Julian. "I have told you my mind. What I have said is fixed as fate. If you will let me go, within this hour I depart from your castle; if you will not, the dishonour be on your own head. Make no more efforts, sir," he added, seeing De Coucy about to speak. "The words once passed from my mouth are never recalled. Ask Giles, my squire, sir,—ask my attendants all. They will tell you the same thing. What Count Julian of the Mount has spoken is as immovable as the earth."

So saying, the old man turned, and walked back to the castle, followed by De Coucy, mourning over the breaking of the bright day-dream, which, like one of the fine gossamers that glitter in the summer, had drawn a bright shining line across his path, but had snapped for ever with the first touch.

Sir Julian's retinue were soon prepared, and the horses saddled in the court-yard; and when all was ready, the old knight brought down his daughter to depart. She was closely veiled, but still De Coucy saw that she was weeping, and advanced to place her on horseback. At that moment, however, one of the squires evidently seeing that all was not right between his lord and the lord of the castle, thrust himself in the way.

"Back, serf!" exclaimed De Coucy, laying his hand upon his collar, and in an instant he was seen reeling to the other side of the court, as if he had been hurled from a catapult. In the meanwhile, De Coucy raised Isadore in his arms, and, placing her on her horse, pressed her slightly in his embrace, saying in a low tone, "Be constant, and we may win yet." Then, yielding the place to Sir Julian, who approached, he ordered the drawbridge of the castle to be lowered.

The train passed through the arch, and over the bridge; and De Coucy advanced to the barbican to catch the last look, as they wound down the hill. Isadore could not resist, and waved her hand for an instant before they were out of sight. De Coucy's heart swelled as if it would have burst; but at that moment his squire approached, and put into his hand a small packet, neatly folded and sealed, which, he said, Alixe the waiting-woman had given him for his lord. De Coucy eagerly tore it open. It contained a lock of dark hair, with the words "Till death," written in the envelope. De Coucy pressed it to his heart, and turned to re-enter the castle.

"Ha, haw! Ha, haw!" cried Gallon the fool, perched on the battlements. "Haw, haw, haw! Ha, haw!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

By tardy conveyances, and over antediluvian roads, news travelled slowly in the days we speak of; and the interdict which we have seen pronounced at Dijon, and unknown at De Coucy Magny, was even some hours older before the report thereof reached Compiègne.

We must beg the gentle reader to remember a sunny-faced youth, for whom the fair Queen of France, Agnes de Meranie, was, when last we left him, working a gay coat of arms. This garment which it was then customary to bear over the armour, was destined to be worn by one whose sad place in history has caused many a tear—Arthur, the son of that Geoffrey Plantagenet who was elder brother of John Lackland, the meanest and most pitiful villain that ever wore a crown.

How it happened that, on the death of Richard Cœur de Lion, the barons of England adhered to an usurper they despised rather than to their legitimate prince, forms no part of this history. Suffice it, that John ruled in England, and also retained possession of all the feofs of his family in France, Normandy, Poitou, Anjou,' and Aquitaine, leaving to Arthur nought but the duchy of Brittany, which descended to him from Constance his mother.

It is not, however, to be thought that Arthur endured with patience his uncle's usurpation of his rights. Far from it. Brought up at the court of France, he clung to Philip Augustus, the friend in whose arms his father had died, and ceased not to importune him for aid to recover his dominions. Philip's limited means, fatigued already by many vast enterprises, for a long time prevented him from lending that succour to the young prince which every principle of policy and generosity stimulated him to grant. But while no national cause of warfare existed to make the war against King John popular with the barons of France, and while the vassals of the English king, though an usurper, remained united in their attachment to him, Philip felt that to attempt the forcible assertion of Arthur's rights would be altogether hopeless. He waited, therefore, watching his opportunity, very certain that the weak frivolity or the treacherous depravity of John's character would soon either alienate some portion of his own vassals, or furnish matter of quarrel for the barons of France.

Several years thus passed after Richard's death, drawn out in idle treaties and fruitless negotiations—treaties which in all ages have been but written parchments; and negotiations, which in most instances are but concatenations of frauds. At length, as Philip had foreseen, the combination of folly and wickedness which formed the principal point of John's mind, laid him open to the long-meditated blow.

In one of his spurts of levity, beholding in the midst of her attendants the beautiful Isabella of Angoulême, affianced to

Hugues le Brun de Lusignan, Comte de la Marche, the English monarch—without the least hesitation on the score of honour, which he never knew, or decency, which he never practised,—ordered her to be carried off from the midst of her attendants, and borne to the castle of the Gueret, where he soon induced her to forget her former engagements with his vassal.

The barons of Poitou, indignant at the insult offered to their order, in the person of one of their noblest companions, and to their family, in the near relation of all the most distinguished nobles of the province, appealed to the court of Philip Augustus, as John's sovereign for his feofs in France. Philip, glad to establish the rights of his court, summoned the King of England before his peers, as Count of Anjou; and on his refusing to appear, eagerly took advantage of the fresh kindled indignation of the barons of Poitou and Anjou to urge the rights of Arthur to the heritage of the Plantagenets.

Already in revolt against John, a great part of each of those provinces instantly acknowledged Arthur for their sovereign; and the indignant nobles flocked to Paris to greet him, and induce him to place himself at their head. Arthur beheld himself now at the top of that tide which knows no ebb, but leads on to ruin or to glory; and accepting at once the offers of the revolted barons, he pressed Philip Augustus to give him the belt and spurs of a knight, though still scarcely more than a boy; and to let him try his fortune against his usurping uncle in the field.

Philip saw difficulties and dangers in the undertaking; but, knowing the power of opportunity, he yielded: not, however, without taking every precaution to ensure success to the young prince's enterprise. For the festivities that were to precede the ceremony of Arthur's knighthood, he called together all those barons who were most likely, from ancient enmity to John, or from ancient friendship for the dead Geoffrey, or from personal regard for himself, or from general love of excitement and danger,—or, in short, from any of those causes that might move the minds of men towards his purpose,—to aid in establishing Arthur in the continental feofs, at least, of the House of Plantagenet.

He took care, too, to dazzle them with splendour and display, and to render the ceremonies which accompanied the Prince's reception as a knight as gay and glittering as possible.

It was for this occasion that Agnes de Meranie, while Philip was absent receiving the final refusal of John to appear before his court, employed her time in embroidering the coat of arms which the young knight was to wear after his reception.

Although the ceremony was solemn, and the details magnificient, we will not here enter into any account of the creation of a knight, reserving it for some occasion where we have not spent so much time in description. Suffice it that the ceremony was over, and the young knight stood before his godfather in chivalry belted and spurred, and clothed in the full armour of a knight. His beaver was up, and his young and almost feminine face would have formed a strange contrast with his warlike array, had it not been for the fire of the Plantagenets beaming out in his eye, and asserting his right to the proud crest he bore,—where a bunch of broom was supported by the triple figure of a lion, a unicorn, and a griffin, the ancient crest of the fabulous King Arthur.

After a few maxims of chivalry, heard with profound respect by all the knights present, Philip Augustus rose, and, taking Arthur by the hand, led the way from the chapel into his council-chamber, where, having seated himself on his throne, he placed the Prince on his right hand, and the barons having ranged themselves round the council-board, the King addressed them thus:—

"Fair knights, and noble barons of Anjou and Poitou!—for to you, amongst all the honourable lords and knights here present, I first address myself,—at your instant prayer, that we should take some measures to free you from the tyranny of an usurper, and restore to you your lawful suzerain, we are about to yield you our well-beloved cousin and son, Arthur, whom we tender as dearly as if he were sprung from our own blood. Guard him, therefore, nobly. Be ye to him true and faithful,—for Arthur Plantagenet is your lawful suzerain, and none other, as son of Geoffrey, elder brother of that same John who now usurps his rights: I, therefore, Philip, King of France, your sovereign and his, now command you to do homage to him as your liege lord."

At these words, each of the barons he addressed rose in turn, and, advancing, knelt before the young prince, over whose fair and noble countenance a blush of generous embarrassment spread itself, as he saw some of the best knights in France bend the knee before him. One after another, also, the barons pronounced the formula of homage, to the following effect:—

"I, Hugo le Brun, Sire de Lusignan, Comte de la Marche, do liege homage to Arthur Plantagenet, my born lord and suzerain,—save and except always the rights of the King of France. I will yield him honourable service; I will ransom him in captivity; and I will offer no evil to his daughter or his wife in his house dwelling."

After this, taking the right hand of each in his, Arthur kissed them on the mouth; which completed the ceremony of the homage.

"And now, fair barons," said Philip, "though in no degree do I doubt your knightly valour, or suppose that, even by your own powers, together with this noble youth's good right, and God to boot, you could not chase from Anjou, Poitou, and Normandy, the traitor John and his plundering bands, yet it befits me not to let my cousin and godson go, without some help from me:—name, therefore, my fair knight," he continued, turning to Arthur, "such of my valiant barons as, in thy good suit, thou judgest fit to help thee valiantly in this thy warfare; and, by my faith! he that refuses to serve thee as he would me, shall be looked upon as my enemy!—Yet remember," added the King, anxious to prevent offence where Arthur's choice might *not* fall—although such selections were common in that day, and not considered invidious,—"remember that it is not by worthiness and valour alone that you must judge,—for then, amongst the knights of France, your decision would be difficult; but there are, as I have before shown you, many points which render some of the barons more capable of assisting you against John of England than others;—such as their territories lying near the war; their followers being horse or foot; and many other considerations which must guide you as you choose."

"Oh, beau sire," replied Arthur, eagerly, "if it rests with me to choose, I name at once that Sir Guy de Coucy I saw at the tournament of the Champeaux. There is the lion in his eye; and I have heard how in the battle of Tyre he slew nineteen Saracens with his own hand."

"He shall be sent to before the year is older by a day," replied Philip. "His castle is but one day's journey from this place. I doubt me though, from what I have heard, that his retinue is but small. However, we will summon all the vassals from the lands of his aunt's husband, the Lord of Tankerville, which will give him the leading of a prince; and, in the mean time, as that may take long, we will give him command to gather a band of Brabançois; which may be soon done, for the country is full of them, unhappily. — But speak again, Arthur. Whom name you next?"

"I would say, Hugues de Dampierre, and the Sire de Beaujeu," replied Arthur, looking towards the end of the table where those two barons sat, "if I thought they would willingly come."

"By my life, they will!" replied Philip. — "What say you, Imbert de Beaujeu?—What say you, Hugues de Dampierre?"

"For my part," replied Hugues de Dampierre, "you well know, beau sire, that I am always ready to put my foot in the stirrup in any honourable cause. I must, however, have twenty days to raise my vassals; but I pledge myself, on the twenty-first day from this, to be at the city of Tours, followed by sixty as good knights as ever couched a lance, all ready to uphold Prince Arthur with hand and heart."

"Thanks, thanks! beau sire," replied Arthur, in an ecstacy of delight. "That will be aid, indeed!" Then, careful not to offend the barons of Poitou by seeming to place more confidence in the strength of others than in their efforts in his cause, he added, "If, even by the assistance of the noble barons of Poitou alone, I could not have conquered my feofs in France, such generous succour would render my success certain; and in truth, I think, that if the Sire de Beaujeu, and the Count de Nevers, who looks as if he loved me, will but hold me out a helping hand, I will undertake to win back my crown of England from my bad uncle's head."

"That will I,—that will I, boy!" said the blunt Count de Nevers. "Hervey de Donzy will lend you his hand willingly, and his sword in it to boot. Ay, and if I bring thee not an hundred good lances to Tours, at the end of twenty days, call me recreant an' you will. My say is said!"

"And I," said Imbert de Beaujeu, "will be there also, with as many men as I can muster, and as many friends as love me, from the other bank of the Loire. So, set thy mind at ease, fair Prince, for we will win thee back the feofs of the Plantagenets, or many a war-horse shall run masterless, and many a casque be empty."

Arthur was expressing his glad thanks, for promises which plumed his young hope like an eagle; and Philip Augustus was dictating to a clerk a summons to De Coucy to render himself instantly to Paris, with what servants of arms he could collect, if he were willing to serve Arthur Duke of Brittany in his righteous quarrel; when the seats which had remained vacant round the council chamber were filled by the arrival of the Bishops of Paris, the Archbishop of Rheims, and several other bishops and mitred abbots, who had not assisted at the ceremony of Arthur's knighthood.

"You come late, holy fathers," said Philip, slightly turning round. "The ceremony is over, and the council nearly so;" and he proceeded with what he was dictating to the clerk.

The clergy replied not, but by a whisper among themselves; yet it was easy to judge from their grave and wrinkled brows, and anxious eyes, that some matter of deep moment sat heavily on the mind of each. The moment after, however, the door of the council-chamber again opened, and two ecclesiastics entered, who, by the distinctive marks which characterize national features, might at once be pronounced Italians.

The clerk, who wrote from Philip's dictation, was kneeling at the table beside the monarch's chair, so that, speaking in a low voice, the King naturally bent his head over him, and consequently took no notice of the two strangers, till he was surprised into looking up, by hearing a deep loud voice begin to read, in Latin, all the most heavy denunciations of the church against his realm and person.

"By the Holy Virgin Mother of Our Lord!" cried the King, his brow reddening and glowing like heated iron, "this insolence is beyond belief! Have they then dared to put our realm in interdict?"

This question, though made generally, was too evidently applied to the bishops for them to escape reply; and the Archbishop of Rheims, though with a flush on his cheek that bespoke no small anxiety for the result, replied boldly, at least as far as words went.

"It is but too true, sire. Our holy father the pope, the common head of the great Christian church, after having in vain attempted to lead you by gentle means to religious obedience, has at length been compelled, in some sort, to use severity; as a kind parent is often obliged to chastise his——"

"How now!" cried Philip, in a voice of thunder: "Dare *you* use such language to me? I marvel you sink not to the earth, Bishop, rather than so pronounce your own condemnation!—Put those men forth!" he continued, pointing to the two Italians, who, not understanding any thing that was said at the table, continued to read aloud the interdict and anathema, interrupting and drowning every other voice, with a sort of thorough bass of curses, that, detached and disjointed as they were, almost approached the ridiculous. "Put them forth!" thundered the King to his men-at-arms. "If they go not willingly, cast them out headlong!—But no!" he added, after a moment, "they are but instruments — use them firmly, but courteously, serjeant. Let me not see them again. — And now, Archbishop, tell me, have you dared to give your countenance and assent to this bold insolence of the pontiff of Rome?"

"Alas! sire, what could I do?" demanded the Archbishop, in a much more humble tone than that which he had before used.

"What could you do!" exclaimed Philip. "By the *joyeuse* of St. Charlemagne! do you ask me what you could do? Assert the rights of the clergy of France! — assert the rights of the King! — refuse to recognise the usurped power of an ambitious prelate! Yield him obedience in lawful things; but stand firmly against him, where he stretched out his hand to seize a prerogative that belongs not to his place! This could you have done, Sir Bishop! and, by the Lord that liveth, you shall find it the worse for you, that you have *not* done it."

"But, sire," urged one of the prelates on the King's right, "the blessed pope is our general and common father!"

"Is it the act of a father to invade his children's rights?" demanded Philip, in the same vehement tone—"is it not rather the act of a bad stepfather, who, coming in, pillages his new wife's children of their inheritance?"

"By my life! a good likeness have you found, Sir King!" said the blunt Count de Nevers. "I never heard a better. The holy church is the poor simple wife, who takes for her second husband this Pope Innocent, who tries to pillage the children—

namely, the church of France—of their rights of deciding on all ecclesiastical questions within the realm."

"It is too true, indeed!" said the King. "Now, mark me, prelates of France! But you first, Archbishop of Rheims! Did you not solemnly pronounce the dissolution of my marriage with Ingerburge of Denmark, after mature consideration and consultation with a general synod of the clergy of France?"

"It is true, indeed; I did, sire!" replied the Archbishop. "But——"

"But me no buts! sir," replied the King. "I will none of them! You did pronounce the divorce. I have it under your hand, and that is enough.—And you, Bishop of Paris? You of Soissons? — and you? — and you? — and you?" he continued, turning to the prelates, one after the other.

No one could deny the sentence of divorce which they had pronounced some years before, and Philip proceeded.

"Well then, by the Lord Almighty, I swear, that you *must*, and *shall*, support your sentence! If you were wrong, you shall bear the blame and the punishment; not I—no, nor one I love better than myself. Let that bishop in France, who did not pronounce sentence of divorce between Ingerburge and myself, enforce the interdict within his diocese if he will; but whosoever shall do so, bishop or abbot, whose hand is to that sentence, I will cast him forth from his diocese, and his feofs, and his lands. I will strip him of his wealth and his rank, and banish him from my realms for ever. Let it be marked and remembered! for, as I am a crowned king, I will keep my word to the letter!"

Philip spoke in that firm, deep, determined tone, which gave no reason to hope or expect that any thing on earth would make him change his purpose. And after he had done, he laid his hand still clasped upon the table, the rigid sinews seeming with difficulty to relax in the least from the tension into which the vehement excitement of his mind had drawn them. He glanced his eyes, too, from countenance to countenance of the bishops, with a look that seemed to dare them to show one sign of resistance.

But all their eyes were cast down in bitter silence, each well knowing that the fault, however it arose, lay amongst themselves; and Philip, after a moment's pause, rose from the table, exclaiming—"Lords and knights, the council is over." And, followed by Arthur and the principal part of the barons, he left the hall.

CHAPTER XIX.

I LOVE not to see any one depart, for the sad magic of fancy is sure to conjure up a host of phantasm dangers, and sorrows, to fill the space between the instant present, and that far distant one, when the same form shall again stand before us. We are sure, too, that Time must work his bitter commission,—that he must impair, or cast down, or destroy; and I know hardly any pitch of human misery so great, that when we see a beloved form leave us, we may justly hope, on our next meeting, to find all circumstances of a brighter aspect. Make up our accounts how we will with Fate, Time is always in the balance against us.

The last sight of Isadore of the Mount called up in the breast of Guy de Coucy as sombre a train of thoughts as ever invaded the heart of man since the fall. When might he see her again? he asked himself, and what might intervene? Would she not forget him? would she indeed be his till death? Would not the slow flowing of hour after hour, with all the obliterating circumstance of time's current, efface his image from her memory? and even if her heart still retained the traces that young affection had there imprinted, what but misery would it bring to both? He had spoken hopes to her ear, that he did not feel himself; and, when he looked up at the large, dark mass of towers and battlements before him, as he turned back from the barbican, it struck his eye with the cold, dead, unhopeful aspect of a tomb. He entered it, however, and, proceeding direct to the inner court, approached the foot of the watch-tower, the small narrow door of which opened there, without communicating with any other building.

De Coucy paced up its manifold steps, and, stationing himself at the opening, fixed his eyes upon the skirt of the forest, where the road emerged, waiting for one more glance of her he loved, though the distance made the sight but the mere slave of fancy. In about a quarter of an hour, the train of Sir Julian appeared, issuing from the forest; and De Coucy gazed, and gazed, upon the woman's form that rode beside the chief of the horsemen, till the whole became an indistinct mass of dark spots, as they wound onward towards Vernon.

Feeling, he knew not why, an abhorrence to his own solitary hall, the young knight remained leaning his arms upon the slight balustrade of the beffroy-tower, which, open on all sides, was only carried up farther by four small pillars supporting the roof, where hung the heavy bell call the *bancloche.* As he thus continued meditating on all that was gloomy in his situation, his eyes still strayed heedlessly over the prospect; sometimes turning in the direction of Paris, as he thought of seeking fortune and honour in arms; sometimes looking again towards Vernon, though the object of his love was no longer visible.

On the road from Paris, however, two objects were to be seen, which he had not remarked before. The first was the figure of a man on foot, at about half a mile's distance from the castle, to which it was slowly approaching: the other was still so far off, that De Coucy could not distinguish at first, whether it was a horseman, or some wayfarer on foot; but the rapidity with which it passed the various rises and falls of the road, soon showed him that, whoever it was, was not only mounted, but proceeding at the full speed of a quick horse.

For a moment or two, from old habits of observation as a soldier, De Coucy watched its approach; but then again, really careless about everything that did not refer to his more absorbing feelings, he turned from the view, and slowly descended the steps of the tower.

His feet turned once more mechanically to the draw bridge, and placing himself under the arch of the barbican, he leaned his tall, graceful figure against one of the enormous door-posts, revolving a thousand vague schemes for his future existence. The strong swimmer, Hope, still struggled up through the waves that Reflection poured continually on his head; and De Coucy's dreams were still of how he might win high fortune and Isadore of the Mount.

Should he, in the first place, he asked himself, defy Guillaume de la Roche Guyon, and make him yield his claim? But no; he remembered the serious vow of the old Count; and he saw, that by so doing he should but cast another obstacle on the pile already heaped up between him and his purpose. Sir Julian had said, too, that Isadore's hand was not to be given away till the coming wars were over. Those wars might be long, De Coucy thought, and uncertain,—and hope lives upon reprieves. He must trust to accident, and, in the meantime, strive manfully to repair the wrong that Fortune had done him. But how? was the question. Tournaments, wars,—all required some equipment, and his shrunk purse contained not a single besant.

"Oh! 'tis a steep and rugged ascent!" thought De Coucy, "that same hill of Fortune; and the man must labour hard that would climb it, like yon old man, toiling up the steep path that leads hither."

Such was the only notice the young knight at first took of the weary foot-traveller he had seen from above; but gradually the figure, dressed in its long brown robe, with the white beard streaming down to the girdle, appeared more familiar to him; and a few steps more, as the old man advanced, called fully to his remembrance the hermit, whose skill had so speedily brought about the cure of his bruises in Auvergne, and whom we have since had more than one occasion to bring upon the scene.

De Coucy had, by nature, that true spirit of chivalrous gallantry, even the madness of which has been rendered beautiful by the great Spaniard. No sooner did he recognise the old man than he advanced to meet him, and aided him as carefully up the steep ascent as a son might aid a parent.

"Welcome, good father hermit!" said he. "Come you here by accident, or come you to rest for a while at the hold of so poor a knight as myself?"

"I came to see whether thou wert alive or dead," replied the hermit. "I knew not whether some new folly might not have taken thee from the land of the living."

"Not yet," replied De Coucy, with a smile: "my fate is yet an unsealed one. But, in faith, good father, I am glad to see thee; for, when thou hast broken thy fast in my hall, I would fain ask thee for some few words of good counsel."

"To follow your own, after you have asked mine?" replied the hermit. "Such is the way with man, at least.—But first, as you say, my son, I will break my fast. Bid some of the lazy herd that of course feed on you, seek me some cresses from the brook, and give me a draught of water."

"Must such be your sole food, good hermit?" demanded De

Coucy. "Will not your vow admit of some more nourishing repast, after so long a journey, too?"

"I seek nought better," replied the hermit, as De Coucy led him into the hall. "I am not one of those who hold that man was formed to gnaw the flesh of all harmless beasts, as if he were indeed but a more cowardly sort of tiger. Let your men give me what I ask,—somewhat that never felt the throb of life, or the sting of death,—those wholesome herbs that God gave to be food to all that live, to bless the sight with their beauty, and the smell with their odour, and the palate with their grateful freshness. Give me no tiger's food. But thou lookest sad, my son," he added, gazing in De Coucy's face, from which much of the sparkling expression of undimmed gaiety of heart that used once to shine out in every feature had now passed away.

"I *am* sad, good hermit," replied the young knight. "Time holds two cups, I have heard say, both of which each man must drink in the course of his life;—either now the sweet, and then the bitter; or the bitter first, and the sweet after; or else, mingling them both together, taste the mixed beverage through existence. Now, I have known much careless happiness in the days past, and I am beginning to quaff off the bitter bowl, sir hermit."

"There is but one resource," said the hermit, "there is but one resource, my son!"

"And what is that?" demanded De Coucy. "Do you mean death?"

"Nay," replied the old man, "I meant Christ's cross. There is the hope, and the succour, and the reward for all evils suffered in this life! Mark me, as I sit here before thee:—didst thou ever see a thing more withered—broken—worn? And yet I was once full of green strength, and flourishing—as proud a thing as ever trampled on his mother-earth: rich, honoured, renowned: I was a very giant in my vanity! My sway stretched over wide, wide lands. My lance was always in the vanward of the battle; my voice was heard in courts, and my council was listened to by kings. I held in my arms the first young love of my heart; and, strange to say! that love increased, and grew to such absorbing passion, that, as years rolled on, I quitted all for it—ambition, strife, pride, friendship,—all."

"Methinks, surely," said De Coucy, with all his feelings for Isadore fresh on his heart's surface, "such were the way to be happy!"

"As much as the way for a gambler to win is to stake all his wealth upon one cast," replied the hermit. "But, mark me! she died, and left me childless—hopeless—alone! And I went out into the world to search for something that might refill the void her loss had left, not in my heart, for that was as a sepulchre to my dead love, never to be opened again;—no, but to fill the void in my thoughts—to give me something to think of—to care for. I went amongst men of my own age (for I was then unbroken), but I found them feelingless or brutal, sensual and voluptuous; either plunderers of their neighbours, or mere eaters and drinkers of fifty. I then went amongst the old; but I found them querulous and tetchy; brimful of their own miseries, and as selfish in their particular pains, as the others in their particular pleasures. I went amongst the young, and there I found generous feelings and unworn thoughts; and free and noble hearts, from which the accursed chisel of time had never hewn out the finer and more exquisite touches of Nature's perfecting hand: but then, I found the wild, ungovernable struggling of the war-horse for the battle plain; the light, thoughtless impatience of the flower-changing butterfly, and I gave it all up as a hopeless search, and sunk back into my loneliness again. My soul withered; my mind got twisted and awry, like the black stumps of the acacia on the sterile plains of the desert; and I lived on in murmuring grief and misanthropy, till came a blessed light upon my mind, and I found *that* peace at the foot of Christ's cross which the world and its things could never give. Then it was I quitted the habitations of men, in whose commune I had found no consolation, and gave myself up to the brighter hopes that opened to me from the world beyond!"

De Coucy was listening with interest, when the sound of the warder's horn from one of the towers announced that something was in sight, of sufficient importance to call for immediate attention.

"Where is Hugo de Barre?" exclaimed the knight, starting up; and, excusing this incivility to the hermit, he proceeded to ascertain the cause of the interruption.

"Hugo de Barre is in the tower himself, beau sire," replied old Onfroy the seneschal, whom De Coucy crossed at the hall door, just as he was carrying in a platter full of herbs to the hermit, with no small symptoms of respect. "I see not why he puts himself up there, to blow his horn, as soon as he comes back! He was never created warder, I trow!"

Without staying to notice the old man's stickling for prerogative, De Coucy hastened to demand of the squire wherefore he had sounded the great warder horn, which hung in the watch-tower.

"One of the king's serjeants-at-arms," cried Hugo, from the top of the tower, "is but now riding up the hill to the castle, as fast as he can come, beau sire."

"Shut the gates!" exclaimed De Coucy. "Up with the bridge!"

These orders were just obeyed, when the king's serjeant, whom Hugo had seen from above, rode up and blew his horn before the gates. De Coucy had by this time mounted the outer wall, and, looking down upon the royal officer, demanded, "Whence come ye, sir serjeant, and whom seek ye?"

"I come from Philip, King of France," replied the serjeant, "and seek Sir Guy de Coucy, châtelain of De Coucy Magny."

"If you seek for no homage or man-service, in the king's name, for these my free lands of Magny," replied De Coucy, "my gates shall open and my bridge shall fall; but if you come to seek liege homage, return to our beau sire, the King, and tell him, that of my own hand I hold these lands; that for them I am not his man; but that they were given as free share, by Clovis, to their first possessor, from whom to me, through father and child, they have by right descended."

"I come with no claim, beau sire," replied the royal messenger, "but simply bear you a loving letter from my liege lord, Sir * Philip the King, with hearty greetings on his part."

"Open the gates, then," cried De Coucy, still, however, taking the precaution to add, in a loud voice,—"Mark, all men,

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* This must not be looked upon as an expression hazarded without authority, notwithstanding its homeliness. The only titles of honour known in those days were Monseigneur, My Lord; Illustres Seigneurs, applied in general to an assembly of nobles; and Beau Sire, or Fair Sir, which was not only bestowed upon kings, on all occasions, but, even as lately as the reign of St. Louis, was addressed to God himself. Many prayers beginning "Beau Sire Dieu" are still extant.

that this is not in sign or token of homage or service; but merely as a courtesy to the messenger of the lord King!" So unsettled and insecure was the right of property in those days, and such were the precautions necessary to guard every act that might be construed into vassalage.

De Coucy descended to receive the messenger; and, on entering the hall, found the old seneschal still busy in serving the hermit, and apparently bestowing on him a full, true, and particular account of the family of the De Coucys, as well as of his young lord's virtues, exploits, and adventures, with the profound and inexhaustible garrulity of an old and favoured servant. At the knight's approach, however, he withdrew; and the King's serjeant-at-arms was ushered into the hall.

"I was commanded to wait no answer, beau sire," said the man, delivering the packet into the châtelain's hand. "The King, trusting to the known loyalty and valour of the Sire de Coucy, deemed that there would be but one reply, when he was called to high deeds and a good cause."

"By my faith!" exclaimed the knight, "I hope some one has dared to touch the glove I hung up in the Queen's good quarrel! I will drive my lance through his heart, if it be defended with triple iron! But I see thou art in haste, good friend. Drain one cup of wine, and thou shalt depart."

De Coucy cut not the silk that tied the packet till the messenger was gone. Then, however, he opened it eagerly, and read:—

"To our faithful and well-beloved Sir Guy de Coucy, these. Having undertaken and pledged our kingly word to Arthur Plantagenet, Duke of Brittany, our well-beloved cousin and godson in arms, to aid him and assist him, to the utmost of our power, in his just and righteous war against John of Anjou, calling himself King of England: and he, Arthur, our cousin, as aforesaid, having desired us to use our best entreaty and endeavour to prevail on you, Sir Guy de Coucy, renowned in arms, to aid with your body and friends in his aforesaid just wars; we therefore, thus moved, do beg, as a king may beg, that you will instantly, on the reading hereof, call together your vassals and followers, knights, squires, and servants of arms, together with all persons of good heart and prowess in war, volunteers or mercenaries, as the case may be, to join the aforesaid Arthur at our court of the city of Paris, within ten days from the date hereof, for the purposes hereinbefore specified. Honour in arms, fair favour of your lady, and the King's thanks, shall be your reward: and, for the payment of such Brabançois or other mercenaries as you can collect to serve under your banner in the said wars, not to exceed five hundred men, this letter shall be your warrant on the treasurer of our royal *domaines*, at the average hire and pay, mensual and diurnal, given by us during the last war. Given at our court of Paris, this Wednesday, the eve of the nativity of the blessed Virgin, Queen of Heaven, to whom we commend thee in all love.

"THE KING."

A radiant flush of joy broke over De Coucy's countenance as he read; but before his eye had reached the end of the letter, importunate memory raked up the forgotten bankruptcy of his means, and cast it in his teeth. The hand which held the letter before his eyes dropped to his side; and with the fingers of the other he wandered thoughtfully over his brow, while he considered and reconsidered every expedient for raising sums sufficient to furnish him worthily forth for the expedition to which he was called. In the meanwhile, the hermit sat beside him, marking his every action, with a glance that might perhaps have suited Diogenes, had not a certain pensive shake of the head, as he gazed on the working of human passions in the noble form before him, showed a somewhat milder feeling than the cynic of the tub was ever touched withal.

"Oh, that foul creditor, Poverty!" muttered De Coucy. "He chains the mind and the heart, as well as the limbs; and pinions down great desires and noble actions, to the dungeon floor of this sordid world. Here, with a career of glory before me, that might lead to riches, to fame, to love! I have not a besant to equip my train, all tattered from the wars in Palestine. As for the Brabançois, too, whom the king bids me bring, they must ever have some money to equip, before they are fit for service. He should have known *that*, at least; but he forgot he wrote to a beggar, who could not advance a crown were it to save his nearest from starvation!"

"You are vexed, my son," said the hermit, "and speak aloud, though you know it not. What is it moves thee thus?"

"I am moved, good hermit," replied the knight, sadly, "that now—at the very moment when all the dearest hopes of my heart call on me to push forward to the highest goal of honour, and when the way is clear before me—that the emptiness of my purse—the perfect beggary of my fortunes, casts a bar in my way that I cannot overleap. Read that letter, and then know, that, instead of a baron's train, I can but bring ten mounted men to serve Prince Arthur; nor are these armed or equipped so that I can look on them without shame. My lodging must be in the field, my food gathered from the earth, till the day of battle; nor dare I join the Prince till then, for the expenses of the city suit not those whose purses are so famished as mine."

"Nay, my son," replied the hermit, calmly, "think better of thy fortunes. To win much, one must often lose somewhat: and by a small expense, though you may not ruffle it amongst the proudest of the Prince's train, you may fit yourself to grace it decently, till such time as, in the battle-field, you can show how little akin is courage to wealth. This may be surely done at a very small expense of gold."

"A small expense of gold!" exclaimed the young knight, impatiently. "I tell thee, good father, I have none! None—no, not a besant!"

"Nay, then," replied the hermit, "something you must sell to produce more hereafter. That rare carbuncle in your thumb ring will bring you doubtless gold enough to shine as brightly as the best."

"Nay," said De Coucy, "I part not with that. I would rather cut off the hand it hangs upon, and coin that into gold."

"Some woman's trinket," said the hermit, with a frown; for men attached to the church, by whatever ties, were not very favourable to the idolatrous devotion of that age to the fairer sex—a devotion which they might think somewhat trenched upon their rights. "Some woman's trinket, on my life!" said the hermit. "Thou wouldst guard no holy relic so, young man."

"Faith, hermit, you do me wrong," replied De Coucy, without flinching. "Though my love to my lady be next to my duty to my God, yet this is not, as you say, a woman's trinket. 'Twas the gift of a good and noble knight, the Count de Tankerville, to me, then young and going to the Holy Land, put on my finger with many a wise and noble counsel, by which I have striven to guide me since. Death, as thou hast heard, good hermit, has since placed his cold bar between us; but I would not part with this for worlds of ore. I am like the wild Arab of the desert," he added, with a smile, "in this sort somewhat superstitious; and I hold this ring, together with the memory of the good man who gave it, as a sort of talisman to guard me from evil spirits."

"Well! if thou wilt not part with it, I cannot help thee," replied the hermit. "Yet I know a certain jeweller would give huge sums of silver for such a stone as that."

"It cannot be!" answered De Coucy. "But now thou mind'st me; I have a bright smaragd, that, in my young days of careless prosperity, I bought of a rich Jew at Ascalon. If it were worth the value that he gave it, 'twere now a fortune to me. I pray thee, gentle hermit, take it with thee to the city. Give it to the jeweller thou speakest of; and bid him, as an honest and true man, send me with all speed what sum he may."

The hermit undertook the charge; and De Coucy instantly sent his page to the chamber, where he had left the emerald, which, being brought down, he committed to the hands of the old man, praying him to make no delay. The hermit, however, still seemed to hanker after the large carbuncle on De Coucy's hand, (which was also, be it remarked, engraved with his signet,) and it was not till the young knight had once and again repeated his refusal, that he rose to depart.

De Coucy conducted him to the outer gate, followed by his page, who, when the old man had given his blessing, and begun to descend the hill, shook his head with a meaning look, exclaiming, "Ah, beau sire! he has got the emerald; and, I fear, you will never hear more of it: but he has not got the carbuncle, which was what he wanted. When first he saw you, at the time you were hurt in Auvergne, he looked at nothing but that; and would have had it off your hand, too, if Hugo and I had not kept our eyes on him all the while."

"Nonsense, nonsense, boy!" cried De Coucy; "send me the new servant of arms, Jodelle!"

The coterel was not long in obeying the summons. "You told me," said De Coucy, as he approached, "not many days ago, that you had once been followed by a band of two hundred Brabançois, who were now, you heard, roaming about, seeking service with some baron or suzerain who would give them employment. Have you any means of communicating with them, should you wish it?"

"Why, you know, beau sire," replied Jodelle, "and there is no use of denying it, that we are oftentimes obliged to separate when the wars are over, and go hither and thither to seek food as we best may; but we take good care not to do so without leaving some chance of our meeting again, when we desire it. The ways we manage that, are part of our mystery, which I am in no manner bound to divulge; but I doubt not I could soon discover, at least, where my ancient companions are.

"I seek none of your secrets, Sir Brabançois," said De Coucy. "If you can find your companions, do; and tell them for me, that the King calls upon me to aid the Prince Arthur Plantagenet against bad John of Anjou, giving me commission, at the same time, to raise a body of five hundred free spears, to serve under my leading; for whose pay, at the rate of the last war, Philip makes himself responsible. If your companions will take service with me, therefore, they may; but each man must have served before, must be well trained to arms, disciplined, and obedient; for De Coucy is no marauder, to pass over military faults, because ye be free companions."

The coterel readily undertook a task that chimed so well with what he already purposed; bounding his promises, however, to endeavours, and striving to wring from De Coucy some offer of present supply to equip his troop, whom he well knew to be in a very indifferent condition, as far as arms and habiliments went.

Finding this to be out of the young knight's power, he left him, and proceeded as rapidly as possible to seek out the hiding-place of the wild band with whom we have already seen him in contact. His farther motions for the next two days were not of sufficient interest to be here put down; but on the third morning he presented himself at the young knight's chamber-door, as he was rising, bringing him news that he had discovered his band, and that they willingly agreed to follow so renowned a knight. He added, moreover, that at mid-day precisely, they would present themselves for monstre, as it was called, or review, in the great carrefour of the forest. In the meantime, he swore faith, true service, and obedience to the young knight in their name, for so long as the war should last.

The time of De Coucy and his followers had been employed in polishing and preparing all the old arms, offensive and defensive, that the castle contained; and of the former, indeed, no small quantity had been collected; so that in the great hall lay many a sheaf of arrows and a pile of spears, with swords, daggers, maces, and bows not a few; some scores of battle-axes and partisans, together with various anomalous weapons, such as bills, hooks, long knives, iron stars, and cutting pikes. But of defensive armour the supply was wofully small.

At the appointed hour of mid-day, the knight, followed by his squire and servants, now armed more completely than on their return from Palestine, proceeded to the great carrefour of the forest, where, as they approached, they beheld the body of Brabançois already arrived on the ground, and drawn up in so regular and soldierlike a manner, that even the experienced eye of De Coucy was deceived at first, and he fancied them as well-armed a body of cavalry as ever he had seen.

When he came into the centre of the carrefour, however, a very different sight struck his eye; and he could not help striking his gauntleted hand upon his thigh till the armour rang again, with pure mortification, at seeing the hopeless state of rust and raggedness of his new recruits.

Nor was this all; not two of the party presented the same appearance. One was in a haubergeon of arms,—another in a hauberk, —another had neither one nor the other. Some had one piece,—some had another—some had none at all. In short, it seemed as if they had murdered half-a-dozen men-at-arms, and divided their armour between two hundred; so that when De Coucy thought of presenting himself, thus followed, at the court of Philip Augustus, he was first inclined to give himself up to despair, and then burst into a loud fit of laughter.

A very slight circumstance, however, changed the face of affairs. As he stood gazing on his ragged troop, with a half-rueful, half-laughing countenance, an ass, apparently loaded with sand, and a man driving it, were seen slowly approaching, as if intending to proceed to the castle.

"By the Lord!" cried the young knight, "this is a godsend —for, on my word, we shall want sand enough to scrub our armour. What hast thou there, good man?" he added, as the ass and his driver came near.

"Sand for the châtelain De Coucy," replied the man. "Be you he?"

"Yes," answered the knight.—"Sand for me! What mean you, good friend? You must mistake."

"Not so, beau sire!" replied the driver, approaching and speaking low—"'tis a thousand marks of silver!"

"Ha!—Whom from?"

"The price of a ring," replied the man, "sent by the holy Bernard of St. Mandé by me, his humble penitent, to the Sire de Coucy."

"That alters the matter!" cried the knight.—"That alters the matter! Take thy sand to the castle, good friend.—Hugo, ride with all speed to Vernon. Bring me all the armourers of the town, with all the arms they have ready. Send a serf to Gisors on the same errand. A thousand marks of silver! By the Lord that lives! I will equip an army!"

CHAPTER XX.

The night was dark and gloomy. A thousand black clouds were flitting over the sky, borne by a quick rough breeze, which ever and anon, with wild caprice, would scatter them abroad, leaving the yellow moonlight to shine bright upon their white edges, and pour a flood of mellow radiance on the world below, and then again would whirl some deep shadowy mass up from the profound verge of the horizon, and once more overwhelm all in gloom and obscurity.

Amidst such occasional glimpses of moonlight, struggled on from the village of Vincennes, through the great forest of St. Mandé, a stout, short man, wrapped in an immense cloak, and preceded by a boy holding a torch, which the high wind threatened every moment to extinguish.

"Art thou sure thou knowest the way, urchin?" cried the man, in a wearied and panting tone, which argued plainly enough that his corpulency loved not deeply the species of stumbling locomotion to which his legs subjected his paunch, amidst the roots and stones of the forest path.—"Art thou sure that thou knowest the road?—Jesu preserve me! I would not lose my way here, to be called to the conclave!"

"Oh, I know the way well!" replied the boy, in a shrill treble. "I come here every day to ask the prayers of the holy hermit for my grandmother, who is ninety years of age, and sick of a hydropsy."

"Better pray God to take her, rather than to leave her!" replied his companion. "'Tis a foolish errand mine,—'tis a foolish errand!" he continued, speaking peevishly to himself, as he struggled to shake off a pertinacious branch of withered thorn which, detached from its parent bush, clung fondly to the tail of his robe, and trailed solemnly on behind him. "Not the errand itself, which is holy, just, and expedient; but the coming at night.—Take care, urchin! The wind will blow it out if you flaunt it after such a fashion. The coming at night! Yet what could I do? The canon of St. Berthe's said true—that if I came in the day, folks would say I could not govern my diocese myself. I told you so, foolish child! I told you so! Now, what are we to do?" continued he, raising his voice to the very highest pitch of dismay and crossness, as a sharp gust of wind, up one of the long glades, extinguished completely] the flame of the torch, which had for some time been wavering with a very undecided sort of flicker;—"now what are we to do?"

"Oh, I know the way, as well without the light as with," replied the same childish voice; "I'll lead you right, beau sire."

"Ay, ay, child," said the other; "but I love not forests in the dark:—this one has a bad name, too—'tis said more sorts of evil spirits than one haunt it. The Lord be merciful unto us! The devil is powerful in these hours of darkness! And besides, there are other dangers—" Here he stumbled over one of the large roots of an elm, shot across the path, and would doubtless have fallen at full length, had not his little guide's shoulder come opportunely in the way of his hand, as it sprawled forth in the act of descent, and thus afforded him some stay;—"Cursed be the root!" cried he; —"cursed be it, above the earth and under the earth!—cursed be it in this life, and to all eternity! Amen.—Lord have mercy upon me! Sinner that I am! I am repeating the anathema. It will never go out of my head, that anathema —cursed be it!—Boy, is it far off still?—Did not you hear a noise?" he added, suddenly.

"I hear the rustling of the wind," replied the child, "but nothing more. You folks that do not live near the forests do not know what sounds it makes sometimes."

"Evil spirits, boy!—evil spirits!" cried the man. "Evil spirits, I tell thee, screaming in their malice; but I vow I hear a rushing, as if there were some wild beasts.—Hark! hark!" and he grasped the boy's arm, looking round and round in the darkness, which his fancy filled with all the wild creation of fear.

"Ne in furore tuo arguas me, Domine, neque in irâ tuâ corripias me. Miserere mei, Domine, quoniam infirmus sum!" cried the frightened traveller; when suddenly the clouds rolled white away from the face of the moon, and her beams for a moment, streaming down clear upon them, showed the wide open glade of the wood, untenanted by any one but themselves, with the old ruined tomb in the forest, and the rude hut of Bernard the hermit. "Kyrie eleïson! Christe eleïson!" cried the traveller, at the sight of these blessed rays; and running forward to reach the dwelling of the hermit, before the clouds again brought darkness over the face of the earth, he arrived, all breathless and panting, and struck hard with his fist against the closed door. "Open, open! brother Bernard! and let me in," he cried, loudly. "Let me in, before the moon goes behind the cloud again."

"Who art thou, who breakest through my prayers?" cried the voice of the hermit. "And why fearest thou the going of the moon? Thou wilt not be one jot wiser when she is gone?"

"Nay! 'tis I, brother Bernard," replied the traveller, fretting with impatience to get in. "'Tis I, I tell thee, man! Thy friend and fellow-labourer in this poor vineyard of France!"

"I have no friend but the Lord, and his holy saints," said the hermit, opening the door.—"But how is this, lord bishop?"

"Hush! hush!" cried the other, holding up his hand. "Do not let the boy hear thee!—I come in secret, upon matters of deep import."

"Does not the text say, '*That which thou doest in secret shall be proclaimed openly?*'" demanded the hermit.—"But what dost thou mean to do with the boy?" continued he, laying his hand on the child's head. "If he be as terrified as thou seemest to be, he will not love to stay till thine errand with me is done."

"Oh, I fear not, father," said the youth. "I am forest bred; and nothing evil would come within sight of thy dwelling."

"Well, poor lad!" said the hermit, "sit there by the door; and if aught scares thee, push it open, and come in."

The boy accordingly seated himself by the door, which was shut upon him; and the hermit pointed to a place on his bed of straw and moss for the bishop's seat. If it had any distinction, 'twas solely that of being situated beneath the crucifix, under which a small lamp was burning, giving the only light which the cell possessed.

The good prelate — for such he was — cast himself upon the moss, and stretching forth his hands on his broad fat knees, employed no inconsiderable space of time in cooling himself, and recovering his breath, after the bodily fear and exertion he had undergone. The hermit seated himself also; and waited, in grave silence, the communication, whatever it was, that brought so respectable a dignitary of the church as the Bishop of Paris to his cell at so unsuitable an hour.

"The Lord be merciful unto me!" cried the Bishop, after a long pause. "What perils and dangers have I not run this very night, for the service of the church, and the poor Christian souls of the French people, who are now crying for the rites and ceremonies of the church, as the tribes of Israel cried for flesh in the desert!"

"But if report speaks right," replied the hermit, "thy flock has no need to cry; as the interdict has not yet been enforced within thy diocese, father Bishop."

"True! unhappily too true!" cried the Prelate, imagining that the hermit imputed blame to him for the delay. "But what could I do, brother Bernard? God knows—praised be his name! — that I have the most holy and devout fear of the authority of the blessed church of Rome; — but how can I bear to tear the food of salvation from the mouths of the poor hungry people?—Besides, when I did but mention it to the King, he cried out, in his rude and furious way:—'By the joyeuse of St. Charlemagne! Bishop, take care what you do! As long as you eat of the fat, and drink of the strong, you prelates of France mind nothing; but let me hear no more of this interdict, or I will smite you hip and thigh! I will drive you forth from your benefices! I will deprive you of your feofs, and I will strip you of your wealth!—and then you may get rosy wines and rich meats where you can!"

A sort of cynical smile gathered round the hermit's lip, as if in his heart he thought Philip's estimate of the clergy of his day was not a bad one: and indeed their scandalous luxury was but too fertile a theme of censure to all the severer moralists of those times. He contented himself, however, with demanding what the prelate intended to do.

"Nay, on that subject, I came to consult you, brother Bernard," replied the Bishop. "You have ever shown yourself a wise and prudent man, since you came into this place, some seven years ago; and all you have recommended has prospered.—Now, in truth, I know not what to do. The King is furious. His love for this Agnes—(if God would but please to take her to himself, what a blessing?)—is growing more and more. He has already cast out half the bishops of France for enforcing the interdict, and seized on the lands of many of the barons who have permitted or encouraged it.—What can I do? If I enforce it, he will cast me out too; and the people will be no better. If I do not enforce it, I fall under the heavy censure of our holy father the pope!"

"You know your duty, father Bishop, far better than I can tell it to you," replied the hermit, with what might almost be called a malicious determination to give no assistance whatever to the poor prelate, who, between his fears of Rome and his dread of losing his diocese, laboured like a ship in a stormy sea. "Your duty must be done."

"But hearken, brother Bernard," said the Bishop. "You know John of Arville, the Canon of St. Berthe's—a keen, keen man, though he be so quiet and calm, and one that knows everything which passes in the world, though he be so devout and strict in his religious exercises."

"I know him well," said the hermit, sternly, as if the qualities of the worthy canon stood not high in his esteem.—What of him?"

"Why, you know that, now William of Albert is dead, this John is head of the canons of St. Berthe," replied the Bishop. "Now, you must know still farther, that, a few days ago, the young Count d'Auvergne, with his train, came to Paris, and was hospitably received by the canons of St. Berthe, in whose church his father had been a great founder. As the interdict is strictly kept in his own part of the country, the Count could not confess himself there; but, wisely and religiously, seeing that years might elapse before he could again receive the comforts of the church, if the interdict lasted, and not knowing what might happen in the mean time—for life is frail, you know, brother Bernard—he resolved to confess himself to John of Arville, the canon; which he did. So, then, you see, John of Arville came away to me, and told me that he had a great secret, which might heal all the wounds of the state."

"How!" exclaimed the hermit, starting up. "Did he betray the secrets of confession?"

"No, no! You mistake, brother Bernard," cried the Bishop, peevishly. "No, no! He did not betray the secrets of confession; but, in his conversations afterwards with the young Count, he drew from him that he loved this Agnes de Meranie, and that she had been promised to him by her brother as he went to the Holy Land; and that her brother being killed there, and her father knowing nothing of the promise, gave her to the King, Philip. But now, hearing that the marriage is not lawful, he—her father, the Duke of Istria—has charged this young Count d'Auvergne, as a knight, and one who was her dead brother's dear friend, secretly to command her, in his name, to quit the court of France, and return to his protection: and the Count has thereon staked life and fortune, that if she will consent, he will find means to bring her back to Istria, in despite of the whole world. This is what he communicated to the reverend canon, not, as you say, in confession, but in sundry conversations after confession."

Bernard the hermit gave no thought to what, in our eyes, may appear a strange commission for a parent like the Duke of Istria to confide to so young a man as the Count d'Auvergne. But in those days, we must remember, such things were nothing strange; for knightly honour had as yet been so rarely violated, that to doubt it for an instant, under such a mark of confidence, would have then been considered as a proof of a base and dishonourable heart. The hermit's mind, therefore, turned alone to the conduct of the priest.

"I understand," replied he, drawing his brows together, even more sternly than he had heretofore done. "The reverend canon of St. Berthe's claims kindred in an equal degree with the fox and the wolf. He has taken care that the Count's secrets, first communicated to him *in* confession, should be afterwards repeated to him without such a seal. Thinks he, I wonder, to juggle Heaven, as well as man, with the letter instead of the spirit? And doubtless, now, he would gladly give the Count d'Auvergne all easy access to persuade this unhappy girl to return; so that he, the canon of St. Berthe's, may but save his diocesan from the unwieldy burden of the interdict, at the expense of a civil war between the powerful Count d'Auvergne and his liege lord, Philip. 'Tis a goodly scheme, good father Bishop; but 'twill not succeed. Agnes loves Philip—looks on him as her husband—refuses to part from him—has the spirit of a hero in a woman's bosom, and may as soon be moved by such futile plans, as the north star by the singing of the nightingale."

"See what it is to be a wise man!" said the Bishop, unable to restrain a little triumphant chuckle at having got the hermit at fault.—"See what it is to be a wise man, and not hear a simple story out! Besides, good brother Bernard, you speak but uncharitably of the reverend canon of St. Berthe's, who is a holy and religious man; though, like you yourself, somewhat too proud of worldly wisdom—ahem!"

"Ahem!" echoed something near; at least, so it seemed to the quick and timorous ears of the worthy prelate, who started up and listened. "Did you not hear something, brother Bernard?" demanded he, in a low voice. "Did you not hear a noise? Cursed be it upon the earth! and—God forgive me——"

"I heard the roaring of the wind, and the creaking of the wood, but nothing else," replied the hermit, calmly. "But what wert thou about to say, Father Bishop? If I have taken thee up wrongly, I am ready to acknowledge my folly. All men are but as fools, and I not amongst the least. If I have wronged the canon of St. Berthe's, I am ready to acknowledge the fault. All men are sinners, and I not amongst the least. But how have I been mistaken at present?"

"Why, altogether!" replied the Prelate, after having re-assured himself by listening several moments without hearing any farther sound,—"altogether, brother Bernard, the canon of St.

Berthe's aims at nothing you have mentioned. No one knows better than he the Queen's mind, as he is her confessor; and he sees well, that till the King shows some sign of willingness to part with her, she will remain fixed to him, as if she were part of himself; but he knows, too, that if Philip does but evince the least coldness—the least slackening of the bonds that bind him to her, she will think he wearies of his constancy, or fears the consequences of his opposition to the holy church, and will herself demand to quit him. His scheme therefore is, to let the King grow jealous of the Count d'Auvergne to such a point as to show some chilliness to the Queen. Agnes herself will think that he repents of his opposition to our blessed father, the Pope, and will propose to depart. Philip's jealousy will prevent him from saying nay; and the reverend canon himself, as her confessor, will conduct her with a sufficient escort to the court of Istria; where, please God! he may be rewarded as he deserves, for the signal service he renders France!"

"Hoo! hoo! hoo!" cried a voice from without, which sounded through the unglazed window as if it was in the very hut.

"Miserere mei, Domine, secundùm multitudinem miserationem tuarum!" exclaimed the Bishop; the rosy hue of his cheek, which had returned, in the security of the hermit's cell, to much the colour of the field pimpernel, now fading away to the hue of the same flower in an ancient herbal.

"'Tis but an owl!—'tis but an owl!" cried the hermit; and, fixing his eyes on the ground, he meditated deeply for several minutes, regardless of the still unsubdued terror of the Bishop, who, drawing a chaplet from beneath his robe, filled up the pause with *paters* and *aves*, strangely mixed with various ungodly curses from the never-forgotten anathema, which in his fright, like prisoners in a popular tumult, rushed forth against his will the moment fear unbarred the door of his lips.

"It is a cruel scheme!" said the hermit at length, "and the man who framed it is a cruel man, who, for his own base ambition of gaining bishoprics in Germany and credit at Rome, scruples not to tear asunder the dearest ties of the heart;—but for you or me, father Bishop," he added, turning more immediately to the prelate, "for you and me, who have no other interest in this thing than the general welfare of our country, to prevent civil war and general rebellion of the King's vassals, which will inevitably ensue if the interdict lasts, especially while he bears so hard a hand upon them,—for us, I say, it is to consider whether by the sorrow inflicted in this instance, infinite, infinite misery may not be spared through the whole nation. If you come, then, father Bishop, to ask me my opinion, I think the scheme which this canon of St. Berthe's proposed may be made use of—as an evil indeed—but as the least, infinitely the least, of two great ones. I think, then, that it may conscientiously be made use of; but, at the same time, I think the worse of the man that framed it—ay! and he knew I should think the worse of him."

"Why, indeed, and in truth, I believe he did," answered the Bishop, who had somewhat recovered his composure by the non-repetition of the sounds. "I believe he did, for he mightily opposed my consulting you on the matter; saying that—though all the world knows, brother Bernard, you are a wise man, and a holy one too; for, indeed, none but a holy man dare inhabit such a wild place, amidst all sorts of evil spirits—cursed be they above the earth and under the earth!—but saying—as I was going to observe—that if I were seen coming here, people would think I knew not how to govern my own diocese, but must needs have your help. So I came here at night, God forgive me and protect me! for if ever the sin of pride and false shame was punished, and repented of with fear and trembling, it has been this night."

So frank a confession changed the cynical smile that was gathering round the anchorite's lips into one of a blander character. "Your coming in the day, good Father Bishop," replied he, "would have honoured me, without disgracing you. The world would but have said, that the holy Bishop of Paris visited the poor hermit of Vincennes, to consult with him for the people's good.—But let us to the question. If you will follow my counsel, good father, you will lay this scheme before that honoured and noble knight and reverend bishop, Guerin; for, believe me, it will be necessary to keep a careful guard over Philip, and to watch him well, lest, his passions being raised to a dangerous degree, it become necessary to tell him suddenly the whole truth. I am absent from him; you are busied with the cares of your flock; and the canon of St. Berthe's *must not* be trusted. But Guerin is always near him; and, with your holy zeal and his prudent watching, this scheme, though it may tear the heart of the King and of the fair unfortunate girl, Agnes his wife, may also save bloodshed, rebellion, and civil war, and raise the interdict from this ill-fated kingdom."

A loud scream, like that of some ravenous bird, but prolonged so that it seemed as if no mortal breath could have given it utterance, thrilled through the air as the hermit spoke, and vibrated round and round the hut. The Bishop sank on his knees, and his little guide pushed open the door and ran in. "I dare stay out there no longer!" cried the boy: "there is something in the tree!—there is something in the tree!"

"Where?" cried the hermit, striding towards the door, his worn and emaciated figure erecting itself, and seeming to swell out with new-born energy. "Where is this sight? Were it the Prince of Evil himself, I defy him!"—and with a firm step, he advanced into the moonlight, between the threshold of the hut and the ancient tomb, casting his eyes up into the shattered oak, whose remaining branches stretched wide and strong over the path.

To his surprise, however, he beheld seated on one of the large boughs, in the attitude of an ape, a dark figure, like that of a man; who no sooner cast his eyes on the hermit, than he began to pour forth more strange and detestable sounds than ever were uttered by a human tongue, moving backwards along the branches at the same time with superhuman agility.

"Avoid thee, Satan! In the name of Jesus thy conqueror! avoid thee!" cried the hermit, holding up the crucifix attached to his rosary.

"Ha, ha! oh rare! The interdict, the interdict!" shouted the vision, gliding along amongst the branches. "Oh rare! oh rare!" And then burst forth a wild scream of unnatural laughter, which for a moment rang round and round, as if echoed by a thousand voices; then died away fainter and fainter, and at last was lost entirely; while the dark figure, from which it seemed to proceed, disappeared amidst the gloom of the thick boughs and leaves.

"Rise, rise, father Bishop!" cried the hermit, entering the hut. "The fiend is gone; and verily his coming, where he has never dared to come before, seemed to show that he is fearful of your design, and would fain scare us from endeavouring to raise the interdict:—rise, good father, I say, and be not frightened from your endeavour!" So saying, the hermit stooped and aided his reverend visiter; whom at his return he had found stretched flat on his face, at the foot of the cross, before which the anchorite's lamp was burning.

"Now, Jesu preserve us! this is very dreadful, brother Bernard!" cried the poor Bishop, his teeth chattering in his head. "How you can endure it, and go on living here, exposed to such attacks, I know not; but I *do* know that one week of such residence would wear all the flesh off my bones."

The hermit glanced his eye, with somewhat of a cold smile, from the round, well-covered limbs of the prelate, to his own meagre and sinewy form. He made not, however, the comment that sprang to his lips, but simply replied, "I am not often subject to such visitations, and, as you see, the enemy flies from me when I appear."

"But, for all that," answered the Bishop, "I tell thee, good brother Bernard, I dare as much go home through that forest alone with this urchin, as I dare jump off the tower of the Louvre!"

"Fear not: I will go with thee," replied the anchorite. "The boy, too, has a torch, I see. The night is now clear, and the wind somewhat gone down, so that the way will be soon trodden."

Company of any kind, under such circumstances, would have been received as a blessing by the good Bishop; but that of so holy a man as the hermit was reputed to be, was doubly a security. Clinging to him, therefore, somewhat closer than bespoke much valour, the prelate suffered himself to be led out into the forest; while the boy, with his torch now lighted again, accompanied them, a little, indeed, in advance, but not sufficiently so as to prevent him also from holding tight by the anchorite's frock.

Thus, then, they proceeded through the winding paths of the wood, now in light, and now in shade, till the dark roofs of the village near Vincennes, sleeping quietly in the moonshine, met once more the delighted eyes of the Bishop of Paris. Here the anchorite bade God speed him, and, turning his steps back again, took the way to his hut.

Did we say that the hermit, Bernard, did not every now and then give a glance to the wood on either side as he passed, or that he did not hold his crucifix in his hand, and, from time to time, murmur a prayer to Heaven or his guardian angel, we should say what was false; but still he walked on with a firm step, and a far more erect carriage than usual, prepared to encounter the enemy of mankind, should he appear in bodily shape, with all the courage of a Christian and the zeal of an enthusiast.

When he had reached his hut, however, and fastened the door, he cast himself on his knees before the cross, and, folding his arms devoutly on his bosom, he exclaimed:—"O, blessed Saviour! pardon if I have sinned in the counsel I have this night given. Let not weakness of understanding be attributed to me for wickedness of heart; but, as thou seest that my whole desire is to serve Thee, and do good unto my fellow-christians, grant, O Lord! pardon and remittance unto the faults of my judgment! Nevertheless, if my counsel be evil, and thou hast permitted thy conquered enemy to show himself unto me visibly, as a sign of thy wrath, let me beseech thee, Lord! to turn that counsel aside that it have no effect, and that the sorrow of my brethren lay not heavy on my head!"

To this extempore prayer the good hermit added one or two from the regular ritual of the church; and then, casting himself on his bed of moss, with a calmed mind, he fell into a profound sleep.

In the meanwhile, day broke upon the glades of the forest; and at about the distance of a mile from the dwelling of the hermit, dropped down from one of the old oaks, with the first ray of the sun, no less a person than our friend Gallon the fool.

"Ha, ha!" cried he, "Ha, ha, haw! My lord ordered me to be shut out, if I came not home by dusk; and now, by my shutting out, I have heard a secret he would give his ears to hear.—Ha, haw! ha, haw!—I've ninety-nine minds not to tell him—but it wants the hundredth. So I will tell him. Then he'll break their plot, or give news of it to the King and the Auvergne;—and then, they'll all be hanged up like acorns.—Haw, haw! and we shall keep the sweet interdict—the dear interdict—the beloved interdict. I saw five dead men lying unburied in the convent field.—Haw, haw, haw! Haw, haw! I love the interdict—I do! 'Tis like my nose: it mars the face of the country, which otherwise were a fair face.—Ha, haw! I love interdicts. My nose is my interdict.—Haw, haw, haw! But I must find other means to spite the De Coucy, for shutting me out! I spited him finely, by sending down the old fool Julian into the glade, where he was cajoling his daughter!—Haw, haw, haw! Ha, haw!" So saying, he bounded forward, and ran as hard as he could towards the distant city.

CHAPTER XXI.

Let us suppose a brief lapse of time and a slight change of scene. 'Twas the month of September; and though the mellow hand of autumn had already spread a rich golden tinge over field and wood, yet not a particle of summer's sparkling brilliancy seemed gone from the clear blue sky. 'Twas in the bright land, too, of merry Touraine, where migratory summer seems to linger longer than anywhere else; and, though the sickle had done its work, and the brown plains told that the year's prime was passed, yet there was a smile on the aspect of the land, as if it would fain have promised that the sweet days of the earth's life would be there immortal.

Over one of the wide open fields of that country, swelling gently with a soft undulating slope, and bordered, here and there, with low scattered woods, were seen to ride a gay party of horsemen, but few in number, indeed, but with their arms glittering in the morning sun, their plumes waving in the breeze, and, in short, with all "the pomp and circumstance of war."

In faith, it was as fair a sight to see as the world can give—a party of the chivalry of that age. For them were all the richest habiliments reserved by law. Robes of scarlet, ornaments of gold, fine furs, and finer stuffs, were all theirs by right; and with their banners and pennons, and their polished armour, their embroidered coats of arms, and their decorated horses, they formed a moving mass of animated splendour, such as the present day cannot afford to show.

The group we speak of at present wanted nothing that chivalry could display. At its head rode a fair youth, just in man's opening day; his eye sparkling, his cheek glowing, his lip smiling with the bursting happiness of his heart, at finding himself freed from restraint, lord of himself, and entering on the brilliant career of arms, supported by knights, by nobles, and by kings, to strive for—not the ordinary stake of ordinary men—but for crowns, and thrones, and kingdoms.

Arthur Plantagenet wore his helmet still; as if the new weight of honourable armour was more a delight than a burthen to him; but the visor being open, his face was clearly exposed, and spoke nothing but hope and animation. His arms were ornamented with gold, and over his shoulders he wore the superb surcoat of arms, which had been worked for him by the fair hands of Agnes de Meranie.

On the prince's right-hand rode Guy de Coucy, with his head still unarmed; and merely covered by a green velvet bonnet, with a jewel, and a plume of the feathers of the white egret, which had been bestowed upon him by the King on his joining the expedition at Paris. Neither did he ride his battle-horse—which, as when we first saw him, was led behind him by a squire—but was mounted on one of the Arabian coursers which he had brought with him from the Holy Land. He had, however, his tremendous long sword by his side, the tip descending to his heel, and the hilt coming up nearly to his shoulder; and, though at the bow of his war-saddle, on the other horse, hung his heavy battle-axe and mace, a lighter axe swung by his side. His gauntlets were on, his squires were close behind him; and by various other signs of the same kind, it might be inferred that the road he was now travelling was more likely to be hostilely interrupted than that over which he had passed in Auvergne.

On Arthur's left hand appeared in complete arms the famous warrior and troubadour, whose songs and whose deeds have descended honourably even to our days, Savary de Mauléon. As in the case of De Coucy, his casque was borne behind him; but, in other respects, he was armed *cap à pié.*

Of this knight one thing must be remarked, which, though it might seem strange, was no less true, and showed the madness of that age for song. Between himself and the squires who bore his casque and led his battle-horse, rode a tiny, beautiful boy, mounted on a small fleet Limousin jennet, and habited with all the extravagant finery which could be devised. In his hand, instead of shield, or lance, or implement of bloody warfare, he bore a small sort of harp, exactly of the shape of those with which the sculptors of that period have represented King David, as well as sundry angels, in the rich tympanums of many of the gothic church-doorways in France. This instrument, however, was not fully displayed on the journey, being covered with a *housse*, or veil of silver gauze, from which, such coverings often being applied to shields of arms, any one passing by might have mistaken it for some buckler of a new and strange form.

Behind this first group, who were followed immediately by their squires, came, at a little distance, a confused body of knights of lesser fame; in general, vassals of Savary de Mauléon, or of his friends; or others who, from disgust towards King John, had come over to the increasing party of his nephew. These were all well armed and equipped; and, though riding for the time in a scattered and irregular manner, it wanted but a word from their chiefs, to bring them into line, or hedge, as it was called, when, with their long lances, heavy-armed horses, and impenetrable persons, they would have offered a formidable barrier against any attack.

A group of servants of arms followed these knights: and behind these again, with far more show of discipline, and covered with bright new armour, came two hundred Brabançois, with their old captain, Jodelle, at their head. Their horses were unarmed, except by an iron poitral, to resist the blow of a lance or a sword on the first assault. The riders also were lightly harnessed, with hauberk, steel cap, and buckler; but, being intended principally to act either as horse-archers themselves, or against bodies of foot, they often proved the most serviceable troops in the army.

At the head of their line rode Hugo de Barre, bearing De Coucy's banner; while, armed something like a Brabançois, but more heavily, with the place of his favourite mare supplied by a strong black horse, Gallon the fool rode along the ranks, keeping the greater part of the soldiers in continual merriment. There were, it is true, some ten or twelve of them who knit their brows from under their iron caps at the jongleur, as he passed; but the generality of the Brabançois laughed at his jest, or gave it him back again; and, indeed, no one seemed more amused or in better harmony with the mad juggler, than the Captain Jodelle himself.

The whole party might consist of about five hundred men; and they moved on slowly, as if not very certain whether they might not be near some unseen enemy. The plain on which we have said they were, was unbroken by anything in the shape of a hedge, and sufficiently flat to give a view over its whole surface; but, at the same time, the low woods that bordered it here and there, might have concealed many thousand men, and the very evenness of the country prevented any view of what was beyond.

"Straight before you, beau sire," said Savary de Mauleon, pointing forward with his hand, "at the distance of three hours' march, lies the famous city of Tours; and even now, if you look beyond that wood, you will catch a faint glance of the church of the blessed St. Martin. See you not a dark grey mass against the sky, squarer and more stiff in form than any of the trees?"

"I do, I do!—And is that Tours?" cried Arthur, each fresh object awakening in his heart that unaccountable delight with which youth thrills towards novelty—that dear brightness of the mind which, in our young days, reflects all things presented to it with a thousand splendid dazzling rays not their own; but, alas! which too soon gets dimmed and dull, in the vile chafing and rubbing of the world. "Is that Tours?" and his fancy instantly conjured up, and combined with the image of the distant city, a bright whirl of vague and pleasant expectations, which, like a child's top, kept dizzily spinning before his eyes, based on an invisible point, and ready to fall on a touch.

"That is Tours, beau sire," replied the knight; "and I doubt not that there, what with all my fair countrymen of Anjou and Poitou, who have already promised their presence, and others who may have come without their promise, you will find knights enough for you to undertake at once some bold enterprise."

Arthur looked to De Coucy, under whose tutelage, as a warrior, Philip Augustus had in some degree placed the inexperienced prince. "Far be it from me," said the knight, "to oppose any bold measure that has the probability of success along with it; but, as a general principle, I think that in a war which is likely to be of long duration, when we expect the speedy arrival of strong reinforcements, and where nothing is to be lost by some delay, it is wise to pause, so as to strike the first strokes with certainty of success; especially where the prince's person may be put in danger by any rash attempt."

"By the blessed St. Martin!" cried Savary de Maulèon, "I thought not to hear the Sire de Coucy recommend timid delay. Fame has, as usual, belied him, when she spoke of his courage as somewhat rash.

De Coucy had, indeed, spoken rather in opposition to the general character of his own mind; but he felt that there was a degree of responsibility attached to his situation, which required the greatest caution, to guard against the natural daring of his disposition. He maintained, therefore, his coolness in reply to the Poitevin knight, although it cost him some effort to repress the same spirit manifesting itself in his language which glowed warm on his brow.

"Sir Guillaume Savary de Maulèon," replied he, "in the present instance, my counsel to Prince Arthur shall be to attempt nothing, till he has such forces as shall render those first attempts certain; and, as to myself, I can but say, that when you and I are in the battle-field, my banner shall go as far, at least, as yours, into the midst of the enemies."

"Not a step farther!" said Savary de Maulèon, quickly—"not a step farther!"

"That shall be as God pleases," answered De Coucy; "but, in the meantime, we are disputing about wind. Till we reach Tours, we cannot at all tell what assistance may wait us there. If there be sufficient force to justify us in proceeding to action, I will by no means dissent; but, if there be but few of our friends arrived, I will say, that man who advises the Prince to attempt anything yet, may be as brave as a lion, but seeks to serve his own vanity more than Arthur Plantagenet."

"How his own vanity, sir?" demanded Savary de Maulèon, ready to take offence on the slightest provocation.

"By risking his prince's fortunes," replied De Coucy, "rather than let others have a share in the harvest of glory before him. Ho, there!" he continued, turning to one of his squires, who instantly rode up.—"Bid Jodelle detach a score of his lightest men round the eastern limb of that wood, and bring me word what 'tis that glittered but now above the trees.—Go yourself too, and use your eyes."

The man obeyed, with the promptitude of one accustomed to serve a quick and imperative lord; and the little manœuvre the knight had commanded was performed with all the precision he could desire. In the meanwhile, he resumed the conversation with Arthur and Savary de Mauléon, who—cooled by the momentary pause, and also somewhat soothed by something flattering, he scarce knew what, in the idea of the sort of avarice of glory De Coucy had attributed to him—replied to the young knight with more cordiality than he had at first evinced. In a very few minutes, the horsemen, who had been detached, returned at full gallop. Their report was somewhat startling. A large body of horse, they said, whose spear-heads De Coucy had seen above the low trees, were skirting slowly round the wood towards them. Full a hundred knights, with barbed horses and party pennons, had been seen. There appeared more behind; and the whole body, with the squires, archers, and servants of arms, might amount to fifteen hundred. No banner, however, was displayed; but one of the Brabançois declared, that he knew the foremost to be King John's Norman knights, by the fashion of their hauberts, and the pikes on their horses' heads.

"Give me my lance and casque!" cried De Coucy.—"Sir Savary de Mauléon, I leave the prince under your care, while I, with my Brabançois and followers, give these gentry the meeting at the corner of the wood. You would not be mad enough in this business to risk the Prince with four hundred men and forty knights, against one hundred knights and fifteen hundred men!"

"Surely not," replied Savary de Mauléon; "but still I will go with you myself, beau sire."

"No! as you are a knight," cried De Coucy, grasping his hand, "I charge you, stay with the prince, cover his march to Tours; keep all the knights with you, for you will want them all. You start fair with the enemy—the distance is about equal to the city; and I promise you, that if they pass yon turn of the wood within this quarter of an hour, 'tis over my dead body—let it be so, sir knight, in God's name! The honour will rest with him who gets the prince safe to Tours. Is not that enough? You have the post of honour."

"And you the post of danger," said Savary de Maulèon, shaking his head.

"Mind not you that!" cried De Coucy, whose casque was by this time fixed. "If these be Normans, there will be danger and honour enough too, before you reach Tours!" and grasping his lance, he fell back to the band of Brabançois, put himself at their head, and galloped at full speed to the turning of the wood.

Before coming in sight of the enemy, however, De Coucy paused, and advancing so far alone as to gain a sight of them, he perceived that their numbers, though they had been somewhat exaggerated, were still too great to admit the chance of fighting them with any hope of success. His object, therefore, was to delay them on their march as long as he could; and then to retreat fighting, so as to cover the prince's march upon Tours. Accordingly he commanded the cotereaux to spread out in such a manner that the iron of their spears might just be seen protruding from the wood, and by patting his horse's neck, and touching him with the spur, he made him utter one or two loud neighs, for the purpose of calling the attention of the enemy, which the sound of their galloping thither did not seem to have done.

The stratagem had its effect: the whole body of horse, who were approaching, halted; and after a few minutes' consultation, a reconnoitring party was thrown out, who approached in front of De Coucy's party, and fell back again instantly on their main body. "Ground your spears!" cried De Coucy; "unsling your bows; have each man his arrow on the string, and the string to his ear; and give them such a flight as shall dizzy them whenever they come near."

The Brabançois obeyed: each man rested his spear,—which, by the way, was distinguished in many respects from the knight's lance,—threw his bridle over his arm, and drew his bowstring to his ear; while De Coucy advanced a few paces, to observe the motions of the enemy. To his surprise, however, he observed half a dozen knights ride out, while the rest stood still; and in a moment after, displaying the banner of Hugues de Lusignan, they advanced at full speed, crying loudly, "Artus Anjou! Artus Anjou!"—the rallying cry which the knights of Anjou attached to the party of Arthur had adopted.

"Hold! hold!" cried De Coucy, waving his hand to his archers. "Here must be some mistake. These are friends." So indeed, it proved; and on a nearer approach, De Coucy found that the body of troops which had caused the alarm, had in truth come forth from Tours, for the protection of Arthur, whom they had long known to be approaching with but a small force; while King John, with a considerable army, was reported to be ravaging the county of Maine. The cause of the mistake also was now explained. Some knights of Normandy, either moved by the justice of Arthur's claims, or disgusted with the weak levity and cowardly baseness of John, had crossed the country; and joining the troops of Hugues le Brun, and Godefroy de Lusignan, under the command of Ruoal d'Issoudun, Count d'Eu, had come out to give the sovereign they had determined to acknowledge welcome and protection.

These communications were much sooner made than they are written; and De Coucy, whose banner had been seen and recognised by the reconnoitring party, was received by the assembled knights with no small marks of honour and esteem. His troops had of course now to make a retrograde motion, but no great haste was necessary to overtake the body he had before left; for Savary de Mauléon had taken such good care that his retreat should not appear like a flight, that the messenger of De Coucy, despatched to inform him of the change of aspect which affairs had undergone, reached the small body of knights who had remained with Arthur before they had proceeded half a mile.

The meeting of the two bands was a joyous one on both sides, and nothing was now talked of amongst the knights of Anjou and Poitou but proceeding instantly to active and energetic operations against the enemy. De Coucy was silent, well knowing that a council must be held on the subject after their arrival at Tours; and reserving his opinion for that occasion, though he well saw that his single voice would be drowned amidst the many, who were all eager to urge a course that, under any other circumstances, he would have been the first to follow, but which, where the stake was a kingdom, and the hazard great, he did not feel himself justified in approving.

While things were thus proceeding, in front of the army, the Brabançois, who now occupied a much less important station than when they formed, as it were, the main body of the prince's force, followed at some little distance in the rear. A few steps in advance of this troop rode Jodelle, particularly affecting to have no private communication with his men; but, on the contrary, sometimes riding up to Hugo de Barre, who bore De Coucy's standard on the right, and with whom he had become a great favourite: and sometimes jesting with Gallon the Fool, whose regard he strove not a little to cultivate, though it was not less difficult to ascertain exactly which way the cracked juggler's esteem turned, than it was to win his affection at all, which was no easy task.

"Ha, ha! Sire Jodelle!" cried Gallon, coming close to him, as they began to move forward towards Tours—"Haw, haw!" A goodly body of prisoners our lord has taken to-day!" and he pointed to the band of knights which had so lately joined their own. "And yet," added Gallon, bringing his two eyes to bear with a sly leer upon Jodelle's face, "our lord does not often make prisoners. He contents himself with dashing his foemen's brains out with his battle-axe, as he did in Auvergne."

Jodelle grasped his sword, and muttered something to himself. Gallon's eyes, however, were like the orbs in an orrery, for an instant close together, and then, by some unapparent machinery, thrown far apart; and before Jodelle could determine what their first expression meant, they were straggling out again on each side of the head in which they were placed, and the shrewd meaning leer was changed at once into the most broad senseless vacancy.

"Oh! it would have done your heart good, Sire Jodelle," continued the jongleur, "to see how he hewed their noddles.—Haw, haw! Oh, rare!—But, as I was saying," continued he, in his flighty, rambling way, "yours must be a merry trade, and a thriving."

"Ours is no trade, maître Gallon," replied Jodelle, speaking calmly, to conceal no very amicable sensations which he felt towards the jongleur—"ours is no trade; 'tis a profession,—the noble profession of arms."

"No trade!" exclaimed Gallon.—"Haw, haw! Haw, haw! If you make no trade of it, with such merchandize as you have, you are not fit to hold a sow by the ear, or soap a cat's tail. Why! Do you not buy and sell?"

"Buy and sell!" said Jodelle, pondering. "Faith! I am heavy this morning. What should I buy or sell, either?"

"Lord now! Lord now!" cried Gallon, holding up both his hands. "To think that there is another man in all the world so stupid as my master and myself!—What should you buy and sell? Why, what better merchandize would you desire to sell to King John," he added, making his horse sidle up against the chief of the Brabançois, so that he could speak without being overheard by any one else,—"what better merchandize would you desire to sell to King John, than that fat flock of sheep before you, with the young ram, and his golden fleece, at the head of them;—and what would you desire better to buy, than white English silver, and yellow English gold?"

Jodelle looked in his face, to see if he could gather anything from that; but all was one flat, dead blank; even his very nose was still and meaningless—one might as well have expected such words of devilish cunning from a stone wall.

"But my oath—my honour!" cried Jodelle, gazing on him still.

"Your oath!—Haw, haw!" shouted Gallon, convulsed with laughter,—"your honour!—Haw, haw! haw, haw! haw, haw!" And rolling about, as if he would have fallen from his horse, he galloped on, shouting, and roaring, and laughing, and screaming, till there was not a man in the army who did not turn his head to look at the strange being who dared to interrupt, with such obstreperous merriment, their leaders' conversation.

De Coucy well knew the sounds, and turned to chide; but Arthur, who had been before amused with Gallon's humour, called him to approach for the purpose of jesting with him, with that boyish susceptibility of absurdities which characterised the age.

Gallon was as much at his ease amongst princes and barons as amongst peasants and serving men; and, seeming to forget all that he had just been speaking of, he dashed off into some new strain of eccentricity better suited to his auditors.

Jodelle, who, trembling for the result, had so far forgot himself as to ride on to listen, now rendered secure by the juggler's flighty change of topic, dropped back into the rear, and the whole cavalcade moved gently on to Tours.

While preparing for the prince's banquet in the evening, the place at De Coucy's elbow was filled by Gallon the Fool, who somewhat in a more sane and placable humour than usual, amused his lord with various tales and anecdotes, neither so disjointed nor so disfigured as his relations usually were. The last, however, which he thought fit to tell—what he had overheard through the unglazed window of the hermit's cell on the night before the party of Arthur quitted Paris, caused De Coucy instantly to write a few words to the Count d'Auvergne, and putting it in the hands of his page, he bade him ride for his life, and deliver the letter wherever he should find the Count, were it even in the presence of the King himself. The fatigued state of the horses prevented the lad from setting out that night, but by daylight next morning he was in the saddle, and away upon a journey which we may have cause to trace more particularly hereafter.

CHAPTER XXII.

After a long consultation with De Coucy, the morning following their arrival at Tours, Arthur Plantagenet proceeded to hold his first regular council of war. Endowed with a thousand graces of person and of mind, Arthur had still that youthful indecision of character, that facility of yielding, which leads the lad so often to do what the man afterwards bitterly repents of.

Arthur entered the council room of the bishop's palace of Tours, fully determined to adhere to the more prudent plan of waiting for the large reinforcements he expected. He took his seat with the proud dignity of a Plantagenet; and though his youthful countenance was in feature and in complexion almost feminine, and his brows were only ornamented with the ducal coronet of Brittany, still, in port and expression, he was every inch a King. There was a dead silence amongst the knights for a moment or two after he had entered, while Arthur spoke a few words to the bishop of Tours, who stood on the right hand of the large throne or chair, in which he was seated. The Prince then turned towards the council; and, with somewhat of a heightened colour, but with a clear tone and unembarrassed manner, he spoke.

"Illustrious lords," he said, "whose valour and wisdom have gained Poitou and Anjou a name with the whole world; as your inferior, both in age and reason, in warlike experience and in prudent sagacity, I come to you for advice and counsel, how to carry forward the great enterprise I have undertaken. We are here, not much above an hundred knights; and our whole forces do not amount to two thousand men; while John, my usurping uncle, is within a few days' march, with ten times our number of men, and full two thousand valiant and renowned knights. To balance this disparity, however, King Philip, my noble and bountiful godfather in arms, has given me, for my auxiliaries and allies, Hervey de Donzy, Count de Nevers, surnamed the Blunt, the valiant Hugues de Dampierre, with all the knights of Berri, and Imbert Baron de Beaujeur, with many a noble baron from the other side of the Loire. These knights arrive to-day at Orleans, and in three days will be here. At the same time, my duchy of Brittany, so faithful to me in all times, sends me five hundred valiant knights, and four thousand men-at-arms, who to-morrow at the latest will be at Nantes. It seems to me, therefore, the wisest plan we can pursue—if you, whose wisdom and experience are greater than mine, do not think otherwise—to remain here at least four days. Often, a short delay produces the greatest benefit; and a wise man of antiquity has said, that it is not the evils which happen that we should struggle to avoid, but those that may happen. Let us also remember, that —though, Heaven knows! no one, or old or young, shall in open warfare more expose their person than I will do, or less cares for life than I do, if it be not life with honour—but still let us remember, that it is my person alone my uncle seeks, because I demand my kingdom, and the freedom of my imprisoned sister.* You all know his cruelty, and I call Heaven to witness, that I would rather now each man here should sheathe his dagger in my body, than suffer me to fall into the hands of my bloody and unnatural relation.

"By letters received last night from the good King Philip, I am informed that John has just seized upon the citadel of Dol, the garrison of which he has put to death after their surrender, the soldiers by the sword, the knights he has crucified. The

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* Eleanor Plantagenet, who was detained till her death, to cut off all change of subsequent heirs in the line of Geoffrey Plantagenet, John's elder brother.

King also assures me, that the usurper is marching hitherward, with all haste; and farther counsels me, to conduct myself with prudence rather than rashness; and to wait the arrival of the reinforcements, which will give me a disposable force of fifteen hundred knights and thirty thousand men."

Arthur paused; and Savary de Maulèon instantly replied:—"Let not the counsels of any one alarm you, beau sire. To cowards be delay; to men of courage, action. John is marching towards us. Let him come; we shall be glad to see him for once show a spark of valour. No, no, beau sire, he will not come. Does he not always fly from the face of arms? He is a coward himself, and the spirit of the prince spreads always through the army. For us, be quick and decided action; and, before this weak and treacherous usurper shall know, even, that we are in the field, let us strike some blow, that shall carry panic to his fearful heart. His bad and wicked mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine, is even now shut up in the town and castle of Mirebeau. The garrison is not large, though commanded by William Longsword, Earl of Salisbury. Let us hasten thither instantly, besiege the castle; and, before John shall have notice of our movements, his mother, the instigator and abettor of one half his wickedness, shall be in our power. Or even say that the castle holds out, our reinforcements may join us there, as well as here, and then success is certain."

The multitude of voices that applauded this proposal drowned all opposition; and though De Coucy pressed but for the delay of a day, to wait the arrival of his own forces, levied in the King's name on the lands of the Count de Tankerville, and which alone would have doubled their present numbers, both of knights and of servants of arms, his proposition was negatived. Arthur yielded to the current; and, catching the ardour of the Poitevins, his eyes sparkled at the idea of surprising Mirebeau, and holding captive that bad queen, who had been the incessant persecutor of his mother, and had acted but the part of a step-dame, even to her own son, his father.

De Coucy saw that farther opposition was vain, and bent the whole energies of his mind to ensure success, even to the scheme he had disapproved.

The knights and barons of Poitou had reasonably enough wondered to see a young warrior, whose greatest fame had been gained by the very rashness of his courage, become the counsellor of caution and delay; but De Coucy was rash only of his own person, holding that a knight ought never even to consider his own individual life, or that of his followers; but should give the whole thought and prudence which he abstracted from himself, to carry forward successfully the object of his undertaking.

He never once dreamed of personal danger; nor could he conceive the idea of any man bestowing a thought upon the hazard to which any enterprise exposed him: and thus, in contemplating an approaching struggle, the whole powers of his mind were bent upon conquering his enemies, and his care for himself was only as a means to that effect.

If the wonder of the knights of Poitou had been excited by De Coucy's former slowness in counselling enterprise, it was far, far more so to behold his activity and energy now that action had really commenced.

He became suddenly, as it were, the soul and spirit of their enterprise: his eye was everywhere; his quick and capable mind seemed continually acting on every side around them. Whatever tidings were demanded of any part of their disjointed force, it was Sir Guy de Coucy knew!—whatever information was required concerning the country before them, De Coucy had already made himself master of it!—whatever movement was to be made by any body of the troops, De Coucy saw it done!—whatever provision was to be brought in for the supply of the army, De Coucy assured himself that it was executed, as far as the brief time permitted. He had recommended delay; but as action had been decided upon, he put forth the whole energetic activity of his soul to render action effective.

Understanding thoroughly the character and application of all the various classes of troops made use of in that day, De Coucy took care that his Brabançois should be turned to that service for which they were best calculated. As reconnoitering parties they were invaluable; and, as the army advanced upon Mirebeau, by spreading them over the face of the country, he gained information of everything that was passing around.

Two messengers from Eleanor of Aquitaine to her son were thus intercepted; and it was discovered from the letters they bare, that she had already obtained knowledge of Arthur's movements, and beseeched John to hasten to her relief; telling him, that though the castle she held might be looked upon as nearly impregnable, yet the suddenness of attack had prevented her from providing for the garrison, sufficiently, at least, for any long siege.

Such news was not lost on De Coucy; and, employing his Brabançois as marauders, in which point of duty they certainly did not fail, he swept the whole country round about of every sort of provisions, both to distress the enemy, and to supply his own troops. This service became one of danger as they approached nearer to the town, the parties of William Longsword being also scattered about on the same errand; and the whole of the morning before their arrival was spent in fierce and continual skirmishes,—now for a drove of bullocks,—now for a cart of wine,—now for a load of wheat.

At length, all the parties of Normans and English were driven within the gates of the town; and the army of Arthur, sitting down before it, invested it on all sides.

We must remember, however, that what were called towns in those days, might consider it a high honour to be compared even to a small English borough of the present times; so that it was no impossible thing for an army of two thousand men to invest even a town and castle.

A council of war was instantly held, and De Coucy's voice was no longer for delay. Immediate attack of the town was his advice; and though many observed that only four hours of daylight remained, he still pressed his object, declaring that, if well seconded, he would place his standard in the market-place before dark. Those who had before reproached him with procrastination dared not oppose him now, and orders were instantly issued for the attack of the walls.

The whole space occupied by the houses of Mirebeau was encompassed by a strong curtain of rough stone, flanked with tall round towers, at the distance of an arrow's flight from each other; so that every part of the wall, though unguarded by a ditch, could be defended, not only from its own projecting battlements, but by the cross fire of missiles from the towers. Both men and munition of war seemed plenty within; for, on the first symptoms of a general attack, the walls became thronged with slingers and bowmen; and numbers of labourers might be seen lighting fires for boiling oil or water, or carrying up baskets of heavy stones, logs of wood, and quantities of quick-lime, to cast down upon the assailants' heads, and crush them, or blind them, if the flights of arrows proved insufficient to keep them from the gates or the foot of the wall.

The defenders of the battlements, indeed, appeared to be principally burghers, mingled with a small proportion of soldiers from the castle; but, although the military citizen was but little esteemed in that day, there was a degree of bustle and promptitude about those who manned the wall of Mirebeau, which, at all events, indicated zeal in its defence.

The preparations on the part of the besiegers were not less active; and Arthur did all that an inexperienced youth could do, to give unity and consistence to the efforts of his undisciplined and insubordinate forces. It must not, however, be thought that we would say the knights who accompanied him were less regular and obedient than others of their times and class. Far from it. But it must be remembered, that discipline was almost unknown amongst the armies of chivalry, and that the feudal system was felt as much, or more, in times of war, than in times of peace. Each baron commanded the knights and men-at-arms he brought into the field. It is true, he received himself commands from the sovereign, or the person who represented him for the moment; but whether he obeyed those commands or not, depended upon a thousand circumstances; as, whether the monarch was himself respected,—whether the orders he gave were to be executed beneath his own eye: and, lastly, whether they suited the taste, or coincided with the opinion, of the person who received them.

In the case of Arthur, every one who followed him thought they had a right not only to counsel, but to act; and the Prince himself, afraid of opposing them, lest they should fall from him before the arrival of the reinforcements placed by Philip more absolutely under his command, could only retain the external appearance of authority, by sanctioning what they themselves proposed.

The tumultuary council held upon the occasion passed in rapid interjections to somewhat of the following tenor. "Let us divide into three bodies!—Each leader attack a gate. Hugues le Brun, I join myself to you.—We will to the southern door.—I attack that postern.—Sire de Mauléon, where do you attack?—

I undertake the great gate; that is, if the beau sire Arthur so commands."

"Certainly, beau sire! I think it will be advisable; but, at all events, let the various attacks be simultaneous," replied the Prince: "let some signal be given when all are ready."

"True, true! Well bethought, beau sire! You are an older warrior than any of us.—Sire de Coucy, where do you attack? I see your men are busy about mantlets and pavisses."

"I attack that tower," replied De Coucy, pointing to one that, though tall and strong, seemed somewhat more ancient than the wall.

"Ha! you would add another tower to those in your chief," said Savary de Mauléon, "but you will fail. We have no ladders. Better come with me to the gate. Well, as you will.—Sire Geoffroy de Lusignan, speed round with your force, and shoot up a lighted arrow when you are ready.—Where do you bestow yourself, beau sire Arthur?"

"If the Prince will follow my counsel," said Hugues le Brun, "he will hover round with the men-at-arms which were given him by the King, and bestow his aid wherever he sees it wanted."

"Or keep on that high ground," said Geoffroy de Lusignan, "and send your commands to us, according as you see the action turn."

Arthur bowed his head; and all the knights rode off towards the different points they had chosen for their attack, except De Coucy, the tower he had marked being exactly opposite the spot where they had held their council, if such it could be called.

"They would fain prevent my fighting," said Arthur, turning to De Coucy, and speaking still in a low voice, as if fearful of some one hearing who might oppose his purpose; "but they will be mistaken. Sire de Coucy, I pray you, as good knight and true, let me fight under your honourable banner."

"To your heart's content, my Prince," replied the knight, "By Heaven! I would not keep you from the noble game before us, for very shame sake!—Hugo de Barre, put foot to the ground, with all my squires, and advance the mantlets.—Have you the pickaxes and the piles all ready?"

"All is ready, beau sire," replied the squire; "store of axes and of iron bars."

"Advance, then!" cried the knight, springing to the ground. "Captain Jodelle, dismount your men, and cover us under your arrows as we advance."

"But the signal has not been given from the other side," said Arthur. "Had you not better wait, Sir Guy?"

"We have more to do than they have," replied the knight; "and, besides, they have left us, and we beginning the attack, the Normans will think ours a false one, and will not repel us so vigorously, more especially as we direct our efforts against a tower instead of a gate; but they are deceived. I see a crevice there in the very base of the wall, that will aid us shrewdly.—Stay here, beau sire, till I return, and then we will in together."

"Oh! Sire de Coucy," cried the noble youth, "you are going to fight without me.—Do not! do not deceive me, I pray you!"

"On my honour, gallant Prince," said De Coucy, grasping his hand, "I will not strike a stroke, except against stone walls, till you strike beside me'!" And he advanced to the spot where Hugo de Barre, and three other of his men, held up an immense heavy screen of wood-work, just within bow-shot of the walls. Four more of the knight's men stood underneath this massy defence, holding all sorts of instruments for mining the wall, as well as several strong piles of wood, and bundles of fagots. As soon as De Coucy joined them, the whole began to move on; and Jodelle's Brabançois, advancing at a quick pace, discharged a flight of arrows at the battlements of the tower, which apparently, by the bustle it occasioned, was not without some effect. An instant answer of the same kind was given from the walls, and missiles of all kinds fell like a thick shower of hail.

In the meanwhile Arthur stood on the mound, with some ten or fifteen men-at-arms, who had been placed near him as a sort of body-guard by Philip. From thence he could behold several points destined to be attacked, and see the preparations of more than one of the leaders for forcing the gates opposite to which they had stationed themselves. But his chief attention still turned towards De Coucy, who was seen advancing rapidly under the immense mantlet of wood he had caused to be constructed, on which the arrows, the bolts, and the stones from the slings fell in vain. On, on, it bore to the very foot of the tower; but then came, on the part of the besiegers, the more tremendous sort of defence of hurling down large stones and trunks of trees upon it; so that, more than once, the four strong men by whom it was supported tottered under the weight, and Hugo de Barre himself fell upon his knee.

This last accident, however, proved beneficial; for the inclined position thus given to the mantlet caused the immense masses that had been cast down upon it to roll off; and the squire rose from his knee with a lightened burden. In the meantime Jodelle and his companions did good and soldierlike service. It was almost in vain that the defenders of the tower shouted for fresh implements to crush the besiegers. Not a man could show himself for an instant on the walls, but an arrow from the bows of the Brabançois struck him down, or rattled against his armour; and thus the supply of fresh materials was slow and interrupted. In the meanwhile, De Coucy and his squires laboured without remission at the foundation of the tower. A large crack, with which the sure sapping hand of Time had begun to undermine the wall, greatly facilitated their purpose; and, at every well-aimed and steady blow which De Coucy directed with his pick-axe at the joints of the mortar, some large mass of masonry rolled out, and left a widening breach in the very base of the tower.

At this moment the signal for the general assault was given, from the other side of the town, by an arrow tipped with lighted tow being shot straight up into the air; and in a moment the whole plain rang with the shouts and cries of the attack and defence.

Arthur could not resist the desire to ride round for a moment, and see the progress of the besiegers in other points; and animated with the sight of the growing strife, the clanging of the trumpets, and the war-cries of the combatants, his very heart burned to join his hand in the fray, and win at least some part of the honour of the day. De Coucy, however, was his only hope in this respect; and galloping back as fast as he could, after having gazed for a moment at the progress of each of the other parties, he approached so near the point where the knight was carrying on his operations, that the arrows from the wall began to ring against his armour. Arthur's heart beat joyfully at the very feeling that he was in the battle; but a sight now attracted his attention, which engrossed all his hopes and fears, in anxiety for the noble knight who was there labouring in his behalf.

The masses of wall which De Coucy and his followers had detached, had left so large a gap in the solid foundation of the tower, that it became necessary to support it with the large piles of wood, to prevent the whole structure from crushing them beneath its fall, while they pursued their labours. This had just been done, and De Coucy was still clearing away more of the wall, when suddenly a knight who seemed to have been informed of what was passing, appeared on the battlements of the tower, followed by a number of stout yeomen, pushing along an immense instrument of wood, somewhat like one of the cranes used in loading and unloading vessels. From a high lever above, hung down the whole trunk of a large tree, tipped at the end with iron; this was brought immediately over the spot where De Coucy's mantlet concealed himself and his followers from the lesser weapons of the besieged, and, at a sign from the knight, the lever slowly raised the immense engine in the air.

"Have a care!—have a care! Sire de Coucy!" shouted at once the whole troop of Brabançois, as well as Arthur's men-at arms. But before their cry could well reach the knight, or be understood, the lever was suddenly loosed, and the ponderous mass of wood fell with its iron-shod point upon the mantlet, dashing it to pieces. Hugo de Barre was struck down, with four of the other squires; but De Coucy himself, who was actually in the mine he had dug, with three more of his followers, who were close to the wall, remained untouched. Hugo, however, instantly sprang upon his feet again, but little injured, and three of his companions followed his example: the fourth remained upon the field for ever.

"Back, Hugo! Back to the Prince, all of you!" cried De Coucy.—"Give me the light, and back!"

The squires obeyed; and having placed in the knight's hand a resin torch which was by this time nearly burnt out, they retreated towards the Brabançois, under a shower of arrows from the walls, which, sped from a good English bow, in more than one instance pierced the lighter armour of De Coucy's squires, and left marks that remained till death. In the meanwhile, not a point of De Coucy's armour, as he moved to and fro at the foot of the tower, that was not the mark of an arrow or a quarrel; while the English knight above animated his men to every exertion, to prevent him from completing what he had begun.

"A thousand crowns to him who strikes him down!" cried he. —"Villains! cast the stones upon him! On your lives, let him not fire those fagots, or the tower and the town are lost.—Give me an arblast!" And as he spoke, the knight snatched a cross-bow from one of the yeomen, dressed the quarrel in it, and aimed steadily at the bars of De Coucy's helmet as he bore forward another bundle of fagots and jammed it into the mine.

The missile struck against one of the bars, and bounded off. "Well aimed, William of Salisbury!" cried De Coucy, looking up. "For ancient love, my old companion in arms, I tell thee to get back from the tower, for within three minutes it is down!" And so saying, he applied his torch to various parts of the pile of wood he had heaped up in the breach, and retired slowly towards Prince Arthur, with the arrows rattling upon his armour like a heavy shower of hail upon some well-roofed building.

"Now, my noble lord," cried he, "down from your horse, and prepare to rush on! By Heaven's grace, you shall be the first man in Mirebeau; for I hear by the shouts that the others have not forced the gates yet.—Hugo, if thou art not badly hurt with that arrow, range the men behind us—By the Lord! William of Salisbury will stay till the tower falls!—See! they are trying to extinguish the fire by casting water over, but it is in vain; the pillars have caught the flame. Hark, how they crack!"

As De Coucy spoke, the Earl of Salisbury and his men, seeing that the attempt to put out the fire was useless, retired from the tower. The flame gradually consumed the heaps of loose wood and fagots with which the knight had filled the mine; and the strong props of wood with which he had supported the wall as he worked on, caught fire, one after the other, and blazed with intense fury. The besiegers and the besieged watched alike in breathless expectation, as the fire wore away the strength of the wood. Suddenly one of the props gave way; but only a mass of heated masonry followed. Another broke —the tower tottered—the others snapped short with the weight —the falling mass seemed to balance itself in the air, and struggle, like an overthrown king, to stand for but a moment longer—then down it rushed, with a sound like thunder, and lay a mass of smoking ruins on the plain.

"On! on!" cried De Coucy; "charge before the dust subsides! A Coucy! a Coucy!—St. Michael! St. Michael!" and in an instant he was standing with Prince Arthur by his side, in the midst of the breach which the fall of the tower had made in the wall, and half-way up the sort of causeway formed by its ruins. They passed not, however, unopposed, for William Longsword instantly threw himself before them.

"Up! Prince Arthur! up!" cried De Coucy; "you must be the first.—Set your foot on my knee:" and he bent it to aid the young Prince in climbing a mass of broken wall that lay before him. Arthur sprang up, sword in hand, amidst the smothering cloud of dust and smoke that still hung above the ruins, and his weapon was instantly crossed with that of his uncle, William of Salisbury, his father's natural brother. At the same moment, De Coucy rushed forward and struck down two of the Norman soldiers who opposed his passage; but then paused, in order not to abandon Arthur to an old and experienced knight, far more than his match in arms.

For five blows and their return, De Coucy suffered the Prince to maintain the combat himself, *to win his spurs,* as he mentally termed it. The sixth stroke, however, of William of Salisbury's tremendous sword fell upon Arthur's shoulder; and though the noble lad sturdily bore up, and was not even brought upon his knee, yet the part of his armour where the blow fell, flew into shivers with its force. The Earl lifted his sword again, and Arthur, somewhat dizzied and confused, made a very faint movement to parry it; but instantly De Coucy rushed in, and received the edge of the weapon on his shield.

"Nobly fought! my Prince!" cried he, covering Arthur with one arm, and returning William Longsword's blow with the other,—"nobly fought, and knightly done!—Push in with your men-at-arms and the Brabançois, and leave this one to me.—Now, Salisbury, old friend, we have stood side by side in Palestine. I love thee as well face to face. Thou art a noble foe. There stands my foot!"

"Brave Coucy! Thou shalt have thy heart's content!" cried the Earl, dealing one of his sweeping blows at the knight's neck.

But he had now met with his equal: and, indeed, so powerful were each of the champions, so skilful in the use of their weapons, and so cool in their contention, that the combat between them was long and undecided. Blow answered blow with the rapidity of lightning: stroke followed stroke. Their arms struck fire, the crests were shorn from their helmets, the bearings effaced from their shields, and their surcoats of arms became as tattered as a beggar's gown.

Still, though De Coucy pressed him with impetuous fury, William of Salisbury yielded not a step; and it was only when he saw his followers driven back by the superior numbers of the Brabançois and the men-at-arms, led by Arthur, that he retired a pace or two, still dealing blows thick and fast at De Coucy, who followed foot by foot, shouting his battle-cry, and encouraging the men to advance: while, every now and then, he addressed some word of friendly admiration to his opponent, even in the midst of the deadly strife that he urged so furiously against him.

"Thou art a good knight, on my soul, Lord Salisbury!" cried he; "yet take that for the despatch of this affair!" and he struck him with the full sway of his blade, on the side of his head, so that the Earl reeled as he stood.

"Gramercy!" cried William, recovering his equipoise, and letting a blow fall on the knight's casque, not inferior in force to the one he had received.

At that moment, however, his troops gave way still farther before the Brabançois; and at the same time a party of the burghers came rushing from another part of the town, crying, "The gate is lost! the gate is lost!—we saw it dashed in!"

"Then the town is lost too," said Salisbury, coolly.—"Sound a retreat!" he continued, turning his head slightly to a squire, who stood behind him watching lest he should be struck down, but forbidden by all the laws of war to interpose between two knights, so long as they could themselves maintain the combat. At the same time, while the squire, as he had been bidden, sounded a retreat on his horn, William Longsword still continued to oppose himself to the very front of the enemy; and not till his men were clear, and in full retreat towards the castle, did he seek to escape himself, though he in a degree quitted the personal combat with De Coucy, to cover with some of his bravest men-at-arms the rear of the rest. Now, he struck a blow here; now felled a Brabançois there; now returned for an instant to De Coucy; and now rushed rapidly to restore order amongst his retreating troops.

As they quitted the walls, however, and got embarrassed in the streets of the town, the Norman soldiers were every moment thrown into more and more confusion, by the various parties of the burghers who had abandoned the walls, and were flying towards the castle for shelter. Several knights, also, and men-at-arms, were seen retreating up the high streets, from the gate which had been attacked by Savary de Mauléon, just at the moment that De Coucy, rushing on into the market-place, caught his standard from the hands of Hugo de Barre, and struck it into the midst of the great fountain of the town.

The flight of the knights showed sufficiently to Lord Salisbury that the gate which they had been placed to defend had been forced also; and his sole care became now to get his men as speedily and as safely within the walls of the castle as possible. This was not so difficult to do; for though De Coucy and Arthur still hung upon his rear with the men-at-arms, and a part of the Brabançois, a great majority of the latter giving way to their natural inclination, dispersed to pursue their ancient avocation of plundering.

A scene of no small horror presented itself at the gates of the castle. Multitudes of the burghers, with their women and children, had crowded thither for safety; but Eleanor, with the most pitiless cruelty, ordered the garrison to drive them back with arrows, and not to suffer one to enter on pain of death. Their outstretched hands, their heart-rending cries, were all in vain; the Queen was inexorable; and more than one had been wounded with the arrows, who had dared to approach the barbican.

When Salisbury and his band came near, however, the multitude, driven to despair by seeing the pursuers following fiercely on his track, made an universal rush to enter along with him; and it was only by using their swords against the townsmen, and even the women, that the soldiers could clear themselves a passage.

Salisbury was of course the last who passed himself; and as he turned to enter, while his soldiers formed again within the barbican, two women, of the highest class of the townspeople, clung to his knees, entreating him by all that may move man's heart, to let them follow within the walls.

"I cannot!—I must not!" exclaimed he, harshly; but then, turning once more, he shouted to De Coucy, who, seeing that farther pursuit was vain, now followed more slowly.

"Sire De Coucy!" he exclaimed, as if he had been speaking to his dearest friend, "if you love me, protect this helpless crowd as much as may be. For old friendship's sake, I pray thee!"

"I will, Salisbury!—I will!" replied De Coucy,—"beau sire Arthur, have I your permission?"

"Do what thou wilt, dear friend and noble knight," replied the Prince. "Is there anything you could ask me now, that I would not grant?"

"Stand back then, ho!" cried the knight, waving his hand to the Brabançois, who were pressing forward towards the trembling crowd of burghers.—"Stand back! Who passes that mark is my foe!" and he cast his gauntlet on the ground in the front of the line.

"We will not be balked of our spoil. The purses of the burghers are ours!" cried several of the free companions; and one sprang forward from immediately behind De Coucy, and passed the bound he had fixed. That instant, however, the knight, without seeing or inquiring who he was, struck him a blow in the face with the pommel of his sword, that laid him rolling on the ground with the blood spouting from his mouth and nose. No one made a movement to follow; and Jodelle—for it was he—rose from the ground, and retired silently to his companions.

De Coucy then advanced with Prince Arthur towards the multitude crowding round the barbican. Immediately, the soldiers on the walls bent their bows: but the voice of the Earl of Salisbury was heard exclaiming, "Whoever wings a shaft at him dies on the spot!" and De Coucy proceeded to tell the people that they must, if they hoped to be spared, yield whatever gold or jewels they had about them to the soldiery; and that all such men as were not clerks must agree to surrender themselves prisoners, and pay a fair ransom, such as should be determined afterwards by the Prince's council.

This matter was soon settled; the universal cry from the burghers being, in their extremity of fear, "Save our lives!—Save our women's honour!—Save our children!—and take gold, or whatever else we possess!" Each one instantly stripped himself of the wealth he had about him; and this, being collected in a heap, satisfied, for the time, the rapacity of the soldiers. De Coucy then took measures to secure the lives of the prisoners; and putting them by twos and threes under the protection of the Prince's men-at-arms and his own squires, he accompanied Arthur to the market-place, followed by the Brabançois, wrangling with each other concerning the distribution of the spoil, and seemingly forgetful of their disappointment in not having been permitted to add bloodshed to plunder.

In the market-place, beside De Coucy's standard, stood Savary de Mauléon, Geoffrey de Lusignan, and several other barons, with three Norman knights as prisoners. The moment De Coucy and Arthur approached, Savary de Mauléon advanced to meet them; and with that generous spirit which formed one of the brighest points in the ancient knightly character, he pressed the former opponent of his counsels in his mailed arms, exclaiming, "By my faith, Sire de Coucy, thou hast kept thy word! There stands thy banner, an hour before sunset! and I proclaim thee, with the voice of all my companions, the lord of this day's fight."

"Not so, fair sir!" replied De Coucy, "not so! There is another, to whom the honour justly belongs.—Who first mounted the breach we made in the wall? Who first measured swords with the famous William Longsword, Earl of Salisbury? and who, in short, has been the first in all this day's achievements?—Here he stands," continued the knight, turning towards the princely youth who stood beside him, blushing to his very brow, both with graceful embarrassment and gratified pride—"here he stands! and may this conquest of Mirebeau be but the first of those that shall, step by step, give him his whole dominions.—Sound trumpets, sound!—Long life to Arthur, King of England!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

Just six days after the events we have related in our last chapter, Guerin, the good minister whom we have so often had occasion to notice, was walking up and down under a range of old beech-trees, which, forming the last limit of the forest of Compiègne, approached close to the castle, and waved their wide branches even over part of the royal garden.

Guerin, however, was not within the boundary of the garden; from which the spot he had chosen for his walk was separated by a palisade and ditch covered towards the castle by a high hedge of shrubs. There was indeed an outlet towards the forest by means of a small postern door, and a slight moveable bridge of wood, but the key of that gate remained alone with the king; so that the minister, to reach the part of the wood in which he walked, must have made a considerable circuit round the castle, and through part of the town itself. His object, probably, in choosing that particular spot, was to enjoy some moments of undisturbed thought, without shutting himself up in the close chambers of a Gothic château. Indeed, the subjects which he revolved in his heart were of that nature, which one loves to deal with in the open air, where we have free space to occupy the matter, while the mind is differently engaged: strong contending doubts, hesitations between right and wrong, the struggles of a naturally gentle and feeling heart, against the dictates of political necessity—such were the guests of his bosom. The topic, which thus painfully busied the minister's thoughts, was the communication made to him by the good but weak Bishop of Paris, as a consequence of his conversation with Bernard, the hermit of St. Mandé.

To tear the hearts of the King and Queen asunder,—to cast between them so sad an apple of discord as jealousy, especially when he felt convinced that Agnes's love to her husband was as firm as adamant,—was a stroke of policy for which the mind of Guerin was hardly framed; and yet the misery that the interdict had already brought, the thousand, thousand-fold that it was yet to bring, could only be done away and averted by such a step. Philip remained firm to resist to the last; Agnes was equally so to abide by his will, without making any attempt to quit him. In a hundred parts of the kingdom, the people were actually in revolt. The barons were leaguing together to compel the King to submission, or to dethrone him; and ruin, wretchedness, and destruction seemed threatening France on every side. The plan proposed by the canon of St. Berthe's might turn away the storm, and yet Guerin would rather have had his hand struck off than put it in execution.

Such were the thoughts, and such the contending feelings, that warred against each other in his breast, while he paced slowly up and down before the palisade of the garden; and yet nothing showed itself upon his countenance but deep calm thought. He was not one of those men whose features or whose movements betray the workings of the mind. There were no wild starts, no broken expressions, no muttered sentences: his corporeal feelings were not sufficiently excitable for such gesticulations: and the stern retired habits of his life had given a degree of rigidity to his features, which, without effort, rendered them on all ordinary events as immovable as those of a statue.

On the present occasion, he was followed by a page bearing his sword; for, as we have before said, during many years after he had been elected to the bishopric of Senlis, he retained the habit of a Knight Hospitaller; but the boy, though accustomed to mark his lord's countenance, beheld nothing there but the usual steady gravity of profound thought.

As he passed backwards and forwards, the voices of two persons conversing in the garden hard by struck his ear. At first, the speakers were afar off, and their tones indistinct; but gradually they came so near, that their words even would have been perfectly audible, had Guerin been one to play the eaves-dropper; and then again they passed on, the sounds dying away as they pursued their walk round their garden.

"The Queen's voice," said Guerin to himself; "and if I mistake not, that of the Count d'Auvergne. He arrived at Compiègne last night, by Philip's own invitation, who expected to have returned from Gournay long since. Pray God, he fail not there! for one rebuff in war, and all his barons would be upon him at once. I wish I had gone myself; for he is sometimes rash. If he were to return now, and find this Auvergne with the Queen, his jealousy might perchance spring from his own head. But there is no hope of that: as he came not last night, he will not arrive till evening."

Such was the course of Guerin's thoughts, when a page, dressed in a bright green tunic of silk, approached, and addressing himself to the follower of the minister, asked his way to the garden of the château.

"Why, you must go a mile and more round by the town, and in at the great gates of the castle," replied Guerin's page.—"What do you seek in the garden?"

"I seek the Count d'Auvergne," replied the youth, "on business of life and death; and they told me that he was in the garden behind the château, close by the forest.—My curse upon all misleaders!" and he turned to retrace his steps through the town.

Guerin had not heeded this brief conversation, but had rather quickened his pace, to avoid hearing what was said by the Queen and the Count d'Auvergne, who at the moment were passing, as we have said, on the other side of the palisade, and spoke loud, in full confidence that no human ears were near. A few words, however, forced themselves upon his hearing.

"And such was my father's command and message," said Agnes in a sorrowful tone.

"Such, indeed, it was, lady," replied the Count d'Auvergne; "and he bade me entreat and conjure you, by all that is dear and sacred between parent and child——"

Guerin, as we have said, quickened his pace: and what the unhappy Count d'Auvergne added was lost, at least to him. Sufficient time had just elapsed to allow the speakers in the garden to turn away from that spot and take the sweep towards the castle, when the sound of horse was heard approaching. Guerin advanced to the end of one of the alleys, and to his surprise beheld the King, followed by about a dozen men-at-arms, coming towards the castle in all haste.

Before he reached the spot where Guerin stood, Philip dismounted, and giving the bridle to one of the squires. "I will through the garden," said he:—"go you round to the gates as quickly as possible—I would not have the poor burgesses know that I am returned, or I shall have petitions and lamentations about this accursed interdict: petitions that I cannot grant—lamentations that I would not hear."

The squire took the bridle, and in obedience to the King's commands, turned another way with the rest of the party; while Philip advanced slowly, with his brow knit, and his eyes fixed on the ground. He did not observe his minister; and, as he came onward, it was easy to read deep, powerful, painful thought in every line of his countenance. Twice he stopped, as he advanced, with his look still bent upon the earth, and remained gazing thereon, without word or motion, for several minutes. It would have seemed that he paused to remark some moss and wild flowers, gathered together at his feet, had not his frowning forehead, and stern, fixed eye, as well as the mournful shake of the head, with which his pause still ended, told that sadder and more bitter contemplations were busy in his mind.

The last time he stopped was within ten paces of Guerin, and yet he did not see him, so deeply occupied were all his thoughts. At length, unclasping his arms, which had been folded over his breast, he clenched his hands tight, exclaiming, "Happy, happy Saladin! Thou hast no meddling priest to disturb thy domestic joys!—By Heaven! I will embrace thy creed, and worship Mahound!"

As he spoke, he raised his eyes, and they instantly rested on the figure of his minister. "Ha, Guerin!" cried the King, "has the interdict driven thee forth from the city?"

"Not so, sire," replied the minister. "I came forth to meditate here in silence, over what might be done to raise it.—Get thee gone, boy!" he continued, turning to his page. "Hie to the castle, and leave me with the King."

"Oh! Guerin!" said Philip, pursuing his own train of thought—"oh, Guerin!" think of these base barons! these disloyal knights! After all their empty enthusiasm!—after all their vain boastings!—after all their lying promises!—falling off from me now, in my moment of need! like flies frightened from a dead carcass by the wings of a raven.—And the bishops too!—the goodly, saintly, fickle, treacherous pack, frightened by the very hum of Rome's vulture wings!—they leave me in the midst of the evil they have made! But, by the Lord above! they shall suffer for their treason! Bishops and barons! they shall feel this interdict as deeply as I do. Their treachery and cowardice shall fill my treasury, and shall swell my crown's domains; and they shall find that Philip knows how to make their punishment increase his power.

Gournay has fallen, Guerin," continued the King, "without the loss of a man. I cut the high sluices and overwhelmed them in the waters of their own artificial lake. Walls, and turrets, and buttresses gave way before the rushing inundation, like straws before the sickle. Half Normandy has yielded without resistance; and I might have come back joyful, but that in every town as I passed, it was murmurs, and petitions, and lamentations on the foul interdict. They brought out their dead," proceeded Philip, grasping Guerin's arm,—"they brought out their dead, and laid them at my feet! They lined the streets with the dying, shrieking for the aid of religion. Oh! Guerin! my friend! 'tis very horrible!—very, very, very horrible!"

"It is indeed, sire!" said Guerin, solemnly, "most horrible! and I am sorry to increase your affliction by telling you, that, by every courier that arrives, the most alarming accounts are brought from the various provinces of your kingdom, speaking of nothing but open rebellion and revolt."

"Where?" cried Philip Augustus, his eyes flashing fire. "Where? Who dares revolt against the will of their liege sovereign?"

"In fifty different points of the kingdom the populace are in arms, sire!" replied the minister. "I will lay the details before you at your leisure. Many of the barons, too, remonstrate in no humble tone."

"We will march against them, Guerin,—we will march against them," replied the King, firmly, "and serfs and barons shall learn they have a lord."

As he spoke, he advanced a few paces towards the garden, then paused, and drawing forth a scrap of parchment, he put it into Guerin's hand. "I found that on my table at Gourney," said the King. "'Tis strange! Some enemy of the Count d'Auvergne has done it!"

Guerin looked at the paper, and beheld, written evidently in the hand of the canon of St. Berthe's, which he well knew; "Sir King, beware of the Count d'Auvergne!" The minister, however had no time to make any reply; for the sound of the voices in the garden began again to approach, and Philip instantly recognised the tones of Agnes de Meranie.

"'Tis the Queen," said he,—"'Tis Agnes!" and as he spoke that beloved name, all the cares and sorrows that, in the world, had gathered round his noble brow, like morning clouds about the high peak of some proud mountain, rolled away, like those same clouds before the risen sun, and his countenance beamed with more than usual happiness.

Guerin had by no means determined how to act, though he decidedly leaned towards the scheme of the canon of St. Berthe's; but the radiant gladness of Philip's eye at the very name of Agnes de Meranie, strangely shook all the minister's conclusions, and he remained more than ever in doubt.

"Hark!" cried Philip, in some surprise—"there is the voice of a man!—To whom does she speak? Know you, Guerin?"

"I believe—I believe, sire," replied the minister, really embarrassed and undecided how to act,—"I believe it is the Count d'Auvergne."

"You believe!—you believe!" cried the King, the blood mounting into his face, till the veins of his temples swelled out in wavy lines upon his clear skin. "The Count d'Auvergne! You hesitate—you stammer, sir bishop!—you that never hesitated in your days before. What means this?—By the God of heaven! I will know!"—and drawing forth the key of the postern, he strode towards it. But at that moment the sound of the voices came nearer and nearer—It was irresistible—The King paused.

Agnes was speaking, and somewhat vehemently. "Once for all, beau sire d'Auvergne," she said, "urge me no more; for, notwithstanding all you say—notwithstanding all my own feelings in this respect, I must not—I cannot—I will not—quit my husband. That name alone, my husband, were enough to bind me to him by every duty; and I will never quit him!"

What were the feelings of Philip Augustus as he heard such words, combined with the hesitation of his minister, with the warning he had received, and with the confused memory of former suspicions! The thoughts that rushed through his brain had nearly driven him to madness. "She loves me not," he thought. "She loves me not—after all I have done and sacrificed for her! She is coldly virtuous—but she loves me not;—she owns, her feelings take part with her seducer!—but she will not leave me, for duty's sake!—Hell and fury! I, that have adored her! She loves me not!—Oh God! she loves me not!—But he,--he—shall not escape me! No,—I will wring his heart of its last drop of blood! I will trample it under my feet!"

His wild straining eye,—the almost bursting veins of his temples,—the clenching of his hands,—but more, the last words, which had found utterance aloud—showed evidently to Guerin the dreadfully over-wrought state of the King's mind; and, casting himself between Philip and the postern as he rushed towards it, he firmly opposed the monarch's passage, kneeling at his feet, and clasping his knees in his still vigorous arms.

"Some one is coming, Count d'Auvergne!" Agnes was heard to say, hastily. "Begone! leave me!—Never let me hear of this again! Begone, sir, I beg!"

"Unclasp me," cried the King, struggling to free himself from Guerin's hold. "Thou knew'st it too, vile confidant! Base betrayer of your sovereign's honour!—Unclasp me, or, by Heaven! you die as you kneel!—Away! I say!" and, drawing his sword, he raised his arm over the Hospitaller's head.

"Strike, sire!" cried Guerin, undauntedly, clasping the monarch's knees still more firmly in his arms—"strike your faithful servant! His blood is yours!—take it! You cannot wound his heart more deeply with your weapon, than you have done with your words.—Strike! I am unarmed; but here I will lie between you and your mad passion, till you have time to think what it is to slay a guest, whom you yourself invited, in your own halls—before you know whether he be guilty or not."

"Free me, Guerin!" said Philip, more calmly, but still with bitter sternness. "Free me, I say! I am the King once more! Nay, hold not my haubert, man!"

Guerin rose, saying, "I beseech you, sire, consider!" But Philip put him aside with a strong arm; and, passing over the bridge, entered the garden by the postern gate.

"Now, God forgive us all, if we have done amiss in this matter; and surely if I have inflicted pain, it has not been without suffering it too." Such was the reflection of the good Bishop of Senlis, when left by Philip; but although his heart was deeply wrung to see the agony of the man he loved, and to be thereof even a promoter, he was not one to waste his moments in fruitless regrets; and, passing through the postern, which the King had neglected to shut, he proceeded as fast as possible, towards the castle, in order to govern the circumstances, and moderate Philip's wrath, as much as the power of man might do.

In the meanwhile, Philip had entered the garden with his sword drawn, and passing through the formal rows of flowering shrubs, which was the taste of that day, he stood for an instant at the top of the large square of ground which lay between him and the castle. Half the way down on the left side, his eye caught the form of Agnes de Meranie; but she was alone, save inasmuch as two of her ladies, following at about a hundred yards' distance, could be said to keep her company. Without turning towards her, Philip passed through a long arcade of trellis-work which ran along the wall to the right, and, with a pace of light, made his way to the castle.

On the steps he paused, replaced his sword in the sheath, and, passing through one of the lesser towers, in a minute after stood in the midst of the great hall. The men-at-arms started up from their various occupations and amusements, and stood marvelling at the unannounced coming of the King; more than one of them taxing themselves internally with some undisclosed fault, and wondering if this unusual visitation portended a reproof.

"Has the Count d'Auvergne been seen?" demanded Philip, in a tone which he meant to be calm, but which, though sufficiently rigid — if such a term may be applied to sound — still betrayed more agitation than he imagined — "has the Count d'Auvergne been seen?"

"He passed but this instant, Sire," replied one of the serjeants, "with a page habited in green, who has been searching for him this hour."

"Seek him!" cried the King, in a voice that needed no repetition; and the men-at-arms vanished in every direction from the hall, like dust scattered by the wind. During their absence, Philip strode up and down the pavement, his arms ringing as he trod, while the bitter gnawing of his nether lip showed but too plainly the burning passions that were kindled in his bosom. Every now and then, too, he would pause at one of the doors, throw it wide open—look out, or listen for a moment, and then resume his perturbed pacing in the hall.

In a few minutes, however, the Bishop of Senlis entered, and approached the King. Philip passed him by, knitting his brow, and bending his eyes on the ground, as if resolved not to see him. Guerin, notwithstanding his frown, came nearer, respect-fully but boldly; and the King was obliged to look up. "Leave me, Sir Guerin," said he. "I will speak with thee anon. Answer not; but leave me, for fear of worse."

"Whatever worse than your displeasure may happen, Sire," replied Guerin, "I must abide it—claiming, however, the right of committing the old servant's crime, and speaking first, if I am to be chidden after."

Philip crossed his arms upon his broad chest, and with a stern brow, looked the minister full in the face; but remained silent, and suffered him to continue.

"You have this day, my lord," proceeded Guerin, with unabated boldness, "used hard terms towards a faithful subject and an ancient friend; but you have conferred the great power upon me of forgiving my King. My lord, I do forgive you, for thinking that the man who has served you truly for twenty years,—since when first, in the boyish hand of fifteen, you held an unsteady sceptre,—would now betray your honour himself, or know it betrayed without warning you thereof. True, my lord, I believed the Count d'Auvergne to be at the moment of your arrival in the castle gardens with your royal Queen."

The King's lip curled, but he remained silent. "Nevertheless," continued Guerin, "so God help me, as I did and do believe he meant no evil towards you, beau sire; and nought but honourable friendship towards the Queen."

"Good man!" cried the King, his lip curling with a sneer, doubly bitter, because it stung himself as well as him to whom it was addressed. "Guerin, Guerin, thou art a good man!—too good, as the world goes!"

"Mock me, Sire, if you will," replied the minister, "but hear me still. I knew the Count d'Auvergne to be the dear friend of this lady's father—the sworn companion in arms of her dead brother: and I doubted not that, as he lately comes from Istria, he might be charged to enforce towards the Queen herself, the same request that her father made to you by letter, when first he heard that the divorce was annulled by the see of Rome—namely, that his daughter might return to his court, and not be made both the subject and sacrifice of long protracted disputes with the supreme pontiff."

"Ha!" said the King, raising his hand thoughtfully to his brow. "Say'st thou?" and for several minutes he remained in deep meditation. "Guerin, my friend," said he, at length, raising his eyes to the minister, as he comprehended at once the Hospitaller's motive for gladly yielding way to such a communication between the Count d'Auvergne and Agnes as that of which he spoke — "Guerin, my friend, thou hast cleared thyself of all but judging ill. Thy intentions—as I believe from my soul they always are — were right. I did thee wrong. Forgive me, good friend, in charity; for, even among kings, I am very, very unhappy!" and he stretched out his hand towards his minister.

Guerin bent his lips to it in silence; and the King proceeded:—

"In clearing thyself too, thou hast mingled a doubt with my hatred of this Thibalt d'Auvergne; but thou hast not taken the thorn from my bosom. She may be chaste as ice, Guerin. Nay, she is. Her every word, her every look speaks it — even her language to him was beyond doubt—but still she loves me not, Guerin! She spoke of duty, but she never spoke of love! She, who has been my adoration — she, who loved me, I thought, as kings are seldom loved—she loves me not!"

Guerin was silent. He felt that he could not conscientiously say one word to strengthen the King's conclusion, that Agnes did not love him; but for the sake of the great object he had in view, of raising the interdict, and thereby freeing France from all the dangers that menaced her, he forbore to express his firm conviction of the Queen's deep attachment to her husband.

Fortunately for his purpose, at this moment one or two of the King's serjeants-at-arms returned, informing Philip, with no small addition of surprise, that they could find no trace of the Count d'Auvergne.

"Let better search be made!" said the King; "and the moment he is found, let him be arrested in my name, and confined, under strict guard, in the chapel tower. Let his usage be good, but his prison sure. Your heads shall answer!" Thus saying, he turned, and left the hall, followed by Guerin, who dared not urge his remonstrances farther at the moment.

CHAPTER XXIV.

It may be necessary here to go back a little, in order to show more fully what had really been that conversation between Thibalt d'Auvergne and the fair Agnes de Meranie, of which but a few words have yet reached the reader's ears.

The Count d'Auvergne had come to the castle of Compiègne, as we have shown, upon the direct invitation of the King himself; and, indeed, Philip had taken more than one occasion to court his powerful vassal; not alone, perhaps, from political motives, but because he felt within himself, without any defined cause, a kind of doubt and dislike towards him, which he believed to be unjust, and knew to be impolitic; and which, he was continually afraid, might become apparent, unless he stretched his courtesy to its utmost extent.

D'Auvergne made no return. The frozen rigidity of his manner was never relaxed for an instant; and whatever warmth the King assumed, it could never thaw him even to a smile. Nor was this wholly the offspring of that personal dislike which he might well be supposed to feel to a happy and successful rival; but he felt that, bound by his promise to the old Duke of Istria, he had a task to perform, which Philip would consider that of an enemy, and therefore D'Auvergne resolved never to bear towards him, for a moment, the semblance of a friend.

Having, after his return to Paris, once more accepted Philip's invitation to Compiègne; which, being made upon the plea of consulting him respecting the conquest of Constantinople, was complied with, without obligation, D'Auvergne proceeded on the evening appointed to the castle; but, finding that Philip had not returned from the siege of Gournay, he lodged himself and his followers, as he best might, in the village. He felt, however, that he must seize the moment which presented itself, of conveying to Agnes her father's message; and convinced, by bitter experience, of the quick and mortal nature of opportunity, the morning after his arrival he proceeded to the castle, and demanded an audience of the Queen.

No sensation on earth, perhaps, can be conceived more bitter than that of seeing the object of one's love in the possession of another; and Thibalt d'Auvergne's heart beat painfully—his very lip grew pale, as he passed into the castle hall, and bade one of the pages announce him to the Queen. A few moments passed, after the boy's departure, in sad expectation; the memory of former days contrasting their bright fancies with the dark and gloomy hopelessness of the present. The page speedily returned, and informed the Count that his lady, the Queen, would see him with pleasure if he would follow to the garden. D'Auvergne summoned all his courage; for there is more real valour in meeting and conquering our own feelings, when armed against us, than in overthrowing the best paladin that ever mounted horse. He followed the boy towards the garden with a firm step, and, on entering, soon perceived the Queen advancing to meet him.

She was no longer the gay, bright girl that he had known in Istria, on whose rosy cheek the touch of care had withered not a flower, whose step was buoyancy, whose eyes looked youth, and whose arching lip breathed the very spirit of gladness. She was no longer the same fair girl we have seen, dreaming with her beloved husband over joys and hopes that royal stations must not know—with the substantial happiness of the present, and the fanciful delights of the future, forming a beamy wreath of smiles around her brow.—No; she was still fair and lovely, but with a sadder kind of loveliness. The same sweet features remained,—the same bland soul, shining from within—the same heavenly eyes—the same enchanting lip; but those eyes had an expression of pensive languor, far different from former days; and that lip, though it beamed with a sweet welcoming smile, as her father's and her brother's friend approached, seemed as if chained down by some power of melancholy, so that the smile itself was sad. The rose too had left her cheek; and though a very, very lovely colour of a different hue had supplied its place, still it was not the colour of the rose. It was something more delicate, more tender, more akin to the last blush of the sinking sun before he stoops into the darkness.

Two of the Queen's ladies were at some distance behind, and, with good discretion, after the Count d'Auvergne had joined their royal mistress, they made that distance greater. D'Auvergne advanced, and, as was the custom of the day, bent his lips to the Queen's hand. The one he raised it in, trembled as if it was palsied; but there was feverish heat in that of Agnes, as he pressed his lip upon it, still more fearful.

"Welcome to the court, beau sire D'Auvergne!" said the Queen, with a sweet and unembarrassed smile. "You have heard that my truant husband, Philip, has not yet returned, though he promised me, with all a lover's vows, to be back by yester-even. They tell me, you men are all false with us women, and, in good truth, I begin to think it."

"May you never find it too bitterly, madam," replied the Count.

"Nay, you spoke that in sad earnest, my lord," said Agnes, now striving with effort for the same playful gaiety that was once natural to her. "You are no longer what you were in Istria, beau sire. But we must make you merrier before you leave our court. Come, you know, before the absolution, must still go confession;" and as she spoke, with a certain sort of restlessness that had lately seized her, she led the way round the garden, adding, "Confess, beau sire, what makes you sad—every one must have something to make them sad—so I will be your confessor. Confess, and you shall have remission."

She touched the Count's wound to the quick, and he replied, in a tone of sadness bordering on reproach: "Oh! madam! I fear me, confession would come too late!"

How a single word—a single tone—a single look, will sometimes give the key to a mystery. There are moments when conception, awakened we know not how, flashes like the lightning through all space, illumining at once a world that was before all darkness. That single sentence, with the tone in which it was said, touched the "electric chain" of memory, and ran brightening along over a thousand links in the past, which connected those words with the days long gone by. It all flashed upon Agnes's mind at once. She had been loved—deeply, powerfully loved; and, unknowing *then* what love was, she had not seen it. But *now*, that love was the constant food of her mind, from morning until night, her eyes were opened at once, and that, with no small pain to herself. The change in her manner, however, was instant; and she felt, that one light word, one gay jest, after that discovery, would render her culpable, both to her husband and to Thibalt d'Auvergne. Her eye lost the light it had for a moment assumed—the smile died away upon her lip, and she became calm and cold as some fair statue.

The Count d'Auvergne saw the change, and felt perhaps why; but as he did feel it, firm in the noble rectitude of his intentions, he lost the embarrassment of his manner, and took up the conversation which the Queen had dropped entirely.

"To quit a most painful subject, madam," he said, calmly and firmly, "allow me to say that I should never have returned to Europe, had not duties called me; those duties are over, and I shall soon go back to wear out the frail rest of life amidst the soldiers of the cross. I may fall before some Saracen lance,—I may taste the cup of the mortal plague; but my bones shall whiten on a distant shore, after fighting under the sign of our salvation. There still, however, remains one task to be performed, which, however wringing to my heart, must be completed. As I returned to France, madam, I know not what desire of giving myself pain made me visit Istria; I there saw your noble father, who bound me by a knightly vow to bear a message to his child."

"Indeed, sir!" said Agnes: "let me beg you would deliver it.—But first tell me, how is my father?" she added, anxiously,—"how looks he? Have age, and the wearing cares of this world, made any inroad on his vigorous strength? Speak, Sir Count!"

"I should say falsely, lady," replied D'Auvergne, "if I said that, since I saw him before, he had not become, when last we met, an altered man. But I was told by those about him, that 'tis within the last year this change has principally taken place."

"Indeed!" said Agnes, thoughtfully: "and has it been very great? Stoops he now? He was as upright as a mountain pine, when I left him. Goes he forth to hunt as formerly?"

"He often seeks the chase, lady," answered the Count, "as a diversion to his somewhat gloomy thoughts; but I am grieved to say, that age has bent the pine."

Agnes mused for several minutes; and the Count remained silent.

"Well, sir," said she, at length, "the message—what is it? Gave he no letter?"

"None, madam," said the Count; "he thought that a message by one who had seen him, and one whose wishes for your welfare were undoubted, might be more serviceable to the purpose he desired."

"My lord, your wishes for my welfare are as undoubted by me as they are by my father," replied the Queen, noticing a slight emphasis which D'Auvergne had placed upon the word *undoubted;* "and therefore I am happy to receive his message from the lips of his friend."

The Queen's words were courteous and kind, but her manner was as cold and distant as if she had spoken to a stranger; and D'Auvergne felt hurt that it should be so, though he well knew that her conduct was perhaps the wisest for both.

After a moment's thought, however, he proceeded to deliver the message wherewith he had been charged by the Duke of Istria and Meranie. "Your father, lady," he said, "charged me to give you the following message;—and let me beg you to remember, that, as far as memory serves, I use his own words; for what might be bold, presumptuous, or even unfeeling, in your brother's poor companion in arms, becomes kind counsel and affectionate anxiety when urged by a parent. Your father, lady, bade me say, that he had received a letter from the common father of the Christian church, informing him that your marriage with the noble King Philip was not, and could not be valid, because——"

"Spare the reasons, sir," said Agnes, with a calm voice, indeed, but walking on, at the same time, with that increased rapidity of pace which showed too well her internal agitation,—"spare the reasons, sir! I have heard them before—Indeed, too, too often!—What said my father, more?"

"He said, madam, that as the Pope assured him, on his apostolic truth, that the marriage never could be rendered valid," continued the Count; "and farther, that the realm of France must be put in interdict—for the interdict, madam, had not been then pronounced; and Celestin, a far milder judge than the present, sat in the chair of St. Peter;—he said, that as this was the case, and as the daughter of the Duke of Meranie was not formed to be an object of discord between a king and a Christian prelate, he begged, and conjured, and commanded you to withdraw yourself from an alliance that he now considered as disgraceful as it had formerly appeared honourable; and to return to your father's court, and the arms of your family, where, you well know, he said, that domestic love and parental affection would endeavour to wipe out from your heart the memory of disappointments and sorrows brought on you by no fault of your own."

"And such, indeed, was my father's command and message?" said the Queen, in a tone of deep affliction.

"Such, indeed, it was, lady," replied the Count d'Auvergne, "and he bade me, farther, entreat and conjure you, by all that is dear and sacred between parent and child, not to neglect his counsel and disobey his commands. He said moreover that he knew——" and Thibalt d'Auvergne's lip quivered as if the agony of death was struggling in his heart—"he said that he knew how fondly you loved the noble King your husband, and how hard it would be to tear yourself from him. But he begged you to remember that your house's honour was at stake, and not to shrink from your duty."

"Sir Count," said Agnes, in a voice that faltered with emotion, "he, nor no one else, *can* tell how I love my husband—how deeply—how fondly—how devotedly. Yet that should not stay me; for though I would as soon tear out my heart, and trample it under my own feet, as quit him, yet I would do it, if my honour and my duty bade me go. But my honour and my duty bid me stay——" She paused, and thoughtfully followed the direction of the walk, clasping her small hands together, and bending down her eyes, as one whose mind, unaccustomed to decide between contending arguments, is bewildered by number and reiteration, but not convinced. She thus advanced some way in the turn towards the castle, and then added—"Besides, even if I would, how could I quit my husband's house and territories? How could I return to Istria without his will?"

"That difficulty, madam, I would smooth for you or die," replied the Count. "The troops of Auvergne could and should protect you."

"The troops of Auvergne against Philip of France!" exclaimed Agnes, raising her voice, while her eye flashed with an unwonted fire, and her lip curled with a touch of scorn. "And doubtless the Count d'Auvergne to head them, and defend the truant wife against her angry husband!"

"You do me wrong, lady," replied D'Auvergne, calmly—"you do me wrong. The Count d'Auvergne is boon for other lands. Nor would he do one act for worlds, that could, even in the ill-judging eyes of men, cast a shade over the fame and honour of one——" He paused, and broke off his sentence, adding—"But no more of that—lady, you do me wrong. I did but deem that, accompanied by your own holy confessor, and what other prelates or clergymen you would, a thousand of my armed vassals might convey you safely to the court of your father, while I, bound by a holy vow, should take shipping at Marseilles, and never set my foot on shore till I might plant it on the burning sands of Palestine.—Lady, may this be?"

"No, lord Count, no!"—replied Agnes, her indignation at any one dreaming of opposing the god of her idolatry still unsubdued, "it cannot, nor it must not be! Did I seek Istria at all, I would rather don a pilgrim's weeds, and beg my way thither on foot. But I seek it not, my lord—I never will seek it. Philip is my husband,—France is my land. The bishops of this realm have freed, by their united decree, their King from all other engagement than that to me; and so long as he himself shall look upon that engagement as valid, I will not doubt its firmness and its truth."

"I have then discharged me of my unpleasant duty, lady," said the Count d'Auvergne. "My task is accomplished, and my promise to your father fulfilled. Yet, that it may be well fulfilled, let me beg you once again to think of your father's commands; and knowing the nobleness of his nature, the clearness of his judgment, and the fearless integrity of his heart, think if he would have urged you to quit King Philip without he thought it your duty to do so."

"He judged as a father; I judge as a wife," replied Agnes. "I love my father—I would die for him; and, but to see him, I would sacrifice crown, and dignity, and wealth. Yet, once for all, beau sire D'Auvergne, urge me no more; for, notwithstanding all you can say—notwithstanding my own feelings in this respect, I must not—I cannot—I will not quit my husband. That name alone, *my husband*, were enough to bind me to him by every duty, and I will never quit him."

D'Auvergne was silent; for he saw, by the flushed cheek and disturbed look of Agnes de Meranie, that he had urged her as far as in honour and courtesy he dared to go. They had by this time turned towards the château, from which they beheld a page, habited in green, advancing rapidly towards them.

"Some one is coming, Count d'Auvergne," said Agnes, hastily, fearful, although her women were at a little distance behind, that any stranger should see her discomposed look.—"Some one is coming.—Begone! Leave me!" And seeing the Count about to speak again, though it was but to take his leave, she added—"Never let me hear of this again! Begone, sir, I beg!"

She then stooped down to trifle with some flowers, till such time as the stranger should be gone, or her own cheek lose the heated flush with which it was overspread.

In the meanwhile, the Count d'Auvergne bowed low, and turned towards the castle. Before he had reached it, however, he was encountered by De Coucy's page, who put a paper in his hand, one glance of which made him hasten forward; and passing directly through the hall of the château, he issued out at the other gate. From thence he proceeded to the lodging where he had passed the night before—called his retainers suddenly together, mounted his horse, and rode away.

As soon as he left her, Agnes de Meranie raised her head from the flowers over which she had been stooping, and walked on slowly, musing, towards the castle; while thought—that strange phantasmagoria of the brain—presented to her a thousand vague and incoherent forms, called up by the conversation that had just passed—plans, and fears, and hopes, and doubts, crowding the undefined future; and memories, regrets, and sorrows, thronging equally the past. Fancy, the quick wanderer, had travelled far in a single moment, when the sound of a hasty step caught her ear, passing along under the trellis of vines that skirted the garden wall. She could not see the figure of the person that went by; but it needed not that she should. The sound of that footfall was as well known to her ear as the most familiar form to her eye; and, bending her head, she listened again, to be sure—very sure.

"'Tis Philip!" said she, all her other feelings forgotten, and hope and joy sparkling again in her eye—"'tis Philip! He sees me not, and yet he knows that at this hour it is my wont to walk here. But perhaps 'tis later than I thought. He is in haste, too, by his step. However, I will in, with all speed, to meet him;" and, signing to her women to come up, she hastened towards the castle.

"Have you seen the King?" demanded she of a page, who hurried to open the gates for her.

"He has just passed, madam," replied the youth. "He seemed to go into the great hall in haste, and is now speaking to the serjeants-at-arms. You may hear his voice."

"I do," said the Queen; and proceeding to her apartments, she waited for her husband's coming, with all that joyful hope that seemed destined in this world as meet prey for disappointment.

CHAPTER XXV.

At Tours, we have seen De Coucy despatch his page towards the Count d'Auvergne; and at Compiègne we have seen the same youth deliver a letter to that nobleman. But we must here pause, to trace more particularly the course of the messenger, which, in truth, was not near so direct as at first may be imagined.

There was, at the period referred to, a little hostelry in the town of Château de Loir, which was neat and well-furnished enough for the time it flourished in.* It had the most comfortable large hearth in the world, which, in those days, was the next great excellence in a house of general reception to that of having good wine, which always held the first place; and round this—on each side of the fire, as well as behind it—was a large stone seat, that might accommodate well fifteen or sixteen persons on a cold evening. At the far corner of this hearth, one night in the wane of September, when days are hot and evenings are chilly, sat a fair youth of about eighteen years of age, for whom the good hostess, an honest, ancient dame, that always prayed God's blessing on a pair of rosy cheeks, was mulling some spiced wine, to cheer him after a long and heavy day's riding.

"Ah, now! I warrant thee," said the good lady, adjusting the wood embers carefully round the little pipkin, on the top of which just began to appear a slight creaming foam, promising a speedy conclusion to her labours—"ay, now! I warrant thee, thou hast seen them all—the fair lady Isadore, and pretty mistress Alice, the head maid, and little Eleanor, with her blue eyes. Ha, sir page, you redden! I have touched thee, child. God bless thee, boy! never blush to be in love. Your betters have been so before thee; and I warrant little Eleanor would blush too. God bless her, and St. Luke the apostate! Oh, bless thee, my boy, I know them all! God wot they stayed here, master and man, two days, while they were waiting for news from the King John; and old Sir Julian himself vowed he was as well here as in the best castle of France or England."

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* I know not precisely how far back a curious antiquary might trace the existence of such places of public reception. I find one mentioned, however, in the Chronicle of Vezelai, about fifty years prior to the period of which I write.

"Well, well, dame! I have ridden hard back, at all events," replied the page; "and I will make my horse's speed soon catch up, between this and Paris, the day and a half I have lingered here; so that my noble lord cannot blame me for loitering on his errand."

"Tut, tut! He will never know a word," cried the old dame, applying to the page that sort of consolatory assurance that our faults will rest unknown, which has damned many a one, both man and woman, in this world—"he will never know a word of it; and, if he did, he would forgive it. Lord, Lord! being a knight, of course he is in love himself, and knows what love is. God bless him, and all true knights! I say."

"Oh, in love—to be sure he is!" replied the page. "Bless thee, dame! when we came all hot from the Holy Land, like loaves out of an oven, my lord no sooner clapped his eyes upon the lady Isadore, than he was in love up to the ears, as they say. Ay! and would ride as far to see her, as I would to see little Eleanor. But tell me, dame, have you staked the door as I asked you?"

"Latch down, and bolt shot!" answered the old lady; "but what shouldst thou fear, poor child? Thou art not of King John's friends, that I well divine; but, bless thee! every one who has passed this blessed day, says they are moving the other way; though, in good troth, I have no need to say God be thanked; for the heavy Normans, and the thirsty English, would sit here and drink me pot after pot, and it mattered not what wine I gave them—Loiret was as good as Beaugency. God bless them all, and St. Luke the apostate! as I said. So what need'st thou fear, boy?"

"Why, I'll tell thee, good dame. If they caught me, and knew I was the De Coucy's man, they would hang me up, for God's benison," said the page; "and I narrowly escaped on the road, too. Five mounted men, with their arms covered with soldiers' mantles,—though they looked like knights, and rode like knights too—chased me for more than a mile. They had a good score of archers at their backs; and I would have dodged them across the country, but every little hill I came to, I saw a body of horse on all sides, moving pace by pace with them. Full five hundred men I counted, one way and another; and there might be five hundred more, for aught I know."

"Now, St. Barbara's toe nail to St. Luke's shoulder bone," exclaimed the hostess, mingling somewhat strangely the relics which she was accustomed to venerate with the profane wagers of the soldiery who frequented her house—"now, St. Barbara's toe nail to St. Luke's shoulder bone, that these are the men whom my lodger up-stairs expected to come to-night!"

"What lodger?" cried the page, anxiously. "Dame, dame, you told me, this very morning, you had none!"

"And I told you true, sir chit!" replied the old woman, bridling at the tone of reproach the page adopted. "I told you true.—There, drink your wine—it is well mulled now;—take care you do not split the horn, pouring it in so hot.—I told you true enough—I had no lodger this morning, when you went; but, half an hour after, came one who had ridden all night, with a great *boutiau* at his saddle, that would hold four quarts. Cursed be those *boutiaus!* they cut us vintners' combs. Every man carries his wine with him, and never sets foot in a hostelry but to feed his horse."

"But the traveller!—the traveller!—Good dame, tell me," cried the page, "what manner of man was he?"

"A goodly man, i'faith," replied the landlady. "Taller than thou art, sir page, by a hand's breadth. He had been in a fray, I warrant, for his eye was covered over with a patch, and his nose broken across. He too would fain not be seen, and made me put him in a guest-chamber at the end of the dormitory. He calls himself Alberic, though that is nothing to me or any one: and there was a Norman came to speak with him an hour after he came; but that is nothing to me either."

"Hark, dame! hark! I hear horses," cried the page, starting up in no small trepidation. "Where can I hide me? Where?" and, even as he asked the question, he began to climb the stairs, that came almost perpendicularly down into the centre of the room, with all the precipitation of fear.

"Not there!—not there!" cried the old woman; "thou wilt meet that Alberic. Into that cupboard;" and, seizing the page by the arm, she pushed him into a closet filled with fagots and brushwood for replenishing the kitchen fire. Under this heap he ensconced himself as well as he might, paying no regard to the skin of his hands and face, which was very sufficiently scratched in the operation of diving down to the bottom of the pile. The old lady, who seemed quite familiar with all such manœuvres, while the sound of approaching horses came nearer and nearer, arranged what he had disarranged in his haste, sat down by the fire, tossed off the remainder of the wine in the pipkin, and began to spin quietly, while the horses' feet that had startled the page clattered on through the village. In a moment after, they stopped at the door; and, at the same time, a heavy footfall was heard pacing forward above, as if some one, disturbed also by the sounds, approached to listen at the head of the stairs.

"Ho! within there!" cried some person without, after having pushed the door, and found it bolted.—"Ho! Within there! Open, I say."

The old dame ran forward, taking care to make her feet give audible sounds of haste upon the floor; and, instantly unfastening the door, she stood becking and bowing to the strangers, as they dismounted from their horses and entered the kitchen.

"God save ye, fair sir!—God save ye, noble gentlemen. Welcome, welcome!—Lord! Lord! I have not seen such a sight of noble faces since good King John's army went. The blessing of God be upon him and them! He is a right well favoured and kingly lord! Bless his noble eyes, and his sweet low forehead, and send him plenty of crowns to put upon it!"

"How, dame! Dost thou know King John?" asked one of the strangers, laying his hand upon the hostess's shoulders, with an air of kindly familiarity. "But thou mistakest. I have heard he is villanous ugly. Ha!"

"Lord forgive you, sire, and St. Luke the apostate!" cried the old woman. "He is the sweetest gentleman you ever set your eyes on. Many a time have I seen him when the army was here; and so handsome he is! Lord, Lord!"

"Ha! methinks thou wouldst look handsomer thus, thyself," cried the stranger, suddenly snatching off the old woman's quoif, and setting it down again on her head with the wrong side in front. "So, my lovely lass!" and he patted the high cap with the whole strength of his hand, so as to flatten it completely. "So, so!"

His four companions burst into a loud and applauding laugh, and were proceeding to follow up his jest upon the old woman, when the other stopped them at once, crying, "Enough, my masters! no more of it. Let us to business. Guillaume de la Roche Guyon, you shall make love to the old wench another time.—Now, beautiful lady!" he continued, mocking the chivalrous speeches of the day, "would those sweet lips but deign to open the coral boundary of sound, and inform an unhappy knight, who has this evening ridden five long leagues, whether one Sir Alberic, as he is pleased to call himself, lodges in your castle?"

"Lord bless your noble and merry heart!" replied the old woman, apparently not at all offended or discomposed by the accustomed gibes of her guests, "how should I know Sir Alberic? I never ask strangers' names that do my poor hostel the honour of putting up at it. Not but that I may have heard the name, and lately; but——"

"But—hold thy peace, old woman!" said a voice from above. "These persons want me, and I want them;" and down the staircase came no less a person than our friend Jodelle, the captain of De Coucy's troop of Brabançois. One eye indeed was covered with a patch; but this addition to his countenance was probably assumed less as a concealment, than for the purpose of covering the marks of a tremendous blow which we may remember the knight had dealt him with the pommel of his sword; and which, notwithstanding the patch, shone out in a large livid swelling all round.

"Tell me, dame," cried he, advancing to the hostess, before he exchanged one word of salutation with the strangers, "who was it that stopped at your gate half an hour ago on horseback, and where is he gone? He was speaking with thee but now, for I heard two voices."

"Lord bless you, sir, and St. Luke the apostate to boot!" said the old woman, "'twas but my nephew, poor boy; frightened out of his life, because he said he had met with some of King Philip's horsemen on the road. So he slipped away when he heard horses coming, and took his beast round to the field to ride off without being noticed, because being of the English party, King Philip would hang him if he caught him."

"King Philip's horsemen!" cried the first stranger, turning deadly pale. "Whence did he come, good dame? What road did he travel, that he saw King Philip's horsemen?"

"He came from Flêche, fair sir," replied the hostess, "and he said there were five of them chased him; and he saw many more scattered about."

"Oh, nonsense!" cried one of the other strangers. "'Tis the youth we chased ourselves. He has taken us for Philip's men. How was he dressed, dame?"

"In green, beau sire," replied the ready hostess. "He had a green cossack on I am well nigh sure."

"'Tis the same!—'tis the same!" said the stranger, who had asked the last question.—"Be not afraid, beau sire," he added, speaking in a low tone to the stranger who had entered first. "Philip is far enough; and were he near, he should dine off the heads of lances, and quaff red blood till he were drunk, ere he harmed a hair of your head. So be not afraid."

"Afraid, sir!" replied the other, drawing himself up haughtily, now re-assured by the certainty of the mistake concerning Philip's horsemen. "How came you to suppose I am afraid?—Now, good fellow," he continued, turning to Jodelle, "are you that Alberic that wrote a billet this morning to the camp at——"

"By your leave, fair sir," interrupted Jodelle, "we will have a clear coast.—Come, old woman, get thee out. We must be alone."

"What! out of my own kitchen, sir?" cried the hostess. "This is hard allowance, surely."

"It must needs be so, however," answered Jodelle: "out at that door, good dame! Thou shalt not be long on the other side;" and, very unceremoniously taking the landlady by the arm, he put her out at the door which opened on the street, and bolted it once more. "And now," said he, "to see that no lurkers are about."

So saying, he examined the different parts of the room, and then opened the door of the closet, in which the poor page lay trembling like an aspen leaf.

"Brushwood!" said Jodelle, taking a candle from one of the iron brackets that lighted the room, and advancing into the closet, he laid his hand on one of the bundles, and rolled it over.

The page, cringing into the space of a pigmy, escaped his sight, however; and the roll of the fagot, instead of discovering him, concealed him still better by falling down upon his head. But still unsatisfied, the marauder drew his sword, and plunged it into the mass of brushwood to make all sure.—There was in favour of the poor page's life but the single chance of Jodelle's blade passing to the right or left of him. Still, that chance was for him. The Brabançois' sword was aimed a little on one side, and, leaving him uninjured, struck against the wall. Jodelle sheathed it again, satisfied, and returned to the strangers, the chief of whom had seated himself by the fire, and was, with strange levity, moralising on the empty pipkin which had held the mulled wine.

His voice was sweet and melodious, and, though he evidently spoke in mockery, one might discover in his speech those tones and accents that lead and persuade.

"Mark! Guillaume de la Roche," said he,—"mark! Pembroke, and you, Sir Alberic, mark well! for it may happen in your sinful life, that never again shall you hear how eloquently a pipkin speaks to man. Look at it, as I hold it now in my hand. No man amongst you would buy it at half a denier; but fill it with glorious wine of Montrichard, and it is worth ten times the sum. Man! man! thou art but a pipkin—formed of clay—baked in youth—used in manhood—broken in age. So long as thou art filled with spirit, thou art valuable and ennobled; but the moment the spirit is out, thou art but a lump of clay again. While thou art full, men never abandon thee; but when thou art sucked empty, they give thee up, and let thee drop as I do the pipkin;" and opening his finger and thumb he suffered it to fall on the floor, where it at once dashed itself to pieces.

"And now, Sir Alberic," continued he, turning to Jodelle, "what the devil do you want with me?

"Beau Sire King," said Jodelle, bending his knee before the stranger, "if you are indeed, as your words imply, John, King of England——"

"I am but a pipkin!" interrupted the light King. "Alas, Sir Alberic, I am but a pipkin.—But proceed, proceed.—I am the King."

"Well then, my lord," answered Jodelle, in truth, somewhat impatient in his heart at the King's mockery, "as I was bold to tell you in my letter, I have heard that your heart's best desire is to have under your safe care and guidance your nephew, Arthur, Duke of Brittany——"

"Thou speakest right, fellow!" cried the King John, wakening to animation at the thought. "'Tis my heart's dearest wish to have him.—Where is the little rebel? Produce him! Have you got him here?"

"Good God! my lord, you forget," said the Earl of Pembroke. "This fair gentleman cannot be expected to carry your nephew about with him, like a holy relic in a reliquary."

"Or, a white mouse in a show-box," added Guillaume de la Roche Guyon, laughing.

"Good, good!" cried John, joining in the laugh.—"But come, Sir Alberic, speak plainly. Where is the white mouse? When wilt thou open thy show-box? We have come ourselves, because thou wouldest deal with none but us; therefore now thou hast our presence, bear thyself discreetly in it.—Come, when wilt thou open the box, I pray?"

"When it pleases you to pay the poor showman his price," said Jodelle, bowing low and standing calmly before the King, in the attitude of one who knows that, for the moment at least, he commands, where he seems to be commanded; and that his demands, however exorbitant, must be complied with.

"Ha!" said John, knitting his brows; "I had forgot that there is not one man in all the earth who has not his price.—Pray, what is thine, fellow?"

"I am very moderate, beau sire," replied Jodelle, with the most imperturbable composure,—"very moderate in regard to what I sell. Would you know, my Lord King, what I demand for placing your nephew Arthur in your hands, with all those who are now assisting him to besiege the queen, your mother, in her château of Mirebeau?—'Tis a worthy deed, and merits some small recompence."

"Speak, speak, man!" cried the King, impatiently. "Go not round and round the matter. Speak it out plainly. What sum dost thou ask?"

"Marry! my lord, there must go more than sums to the bargain," replied Jodelle, boldly. "But if you would know justly what I do demand, 'tis this. First, you shall pay me down, or give me here an order on your royal treasury for the sum of ten thousand marks in what coin you will."

"By the Lord, and the Holy Evangelists!" cried the King; but, then pausing, he added, while he turned a half smiling glance to Lord Pembroke:—"Well, thou shalt have the order on the royal treasury. What next?"

"After you have given me the order, sire," replied Jodelle, answering the meaning of the King's smile, "I will find means to wring the money out of your friends, or out of your enemies, even should your treasure be as dry as hay."

"Try my enemies first, good Alberic," said the King; "my friends have enough to do already.—But what next? for you put that firstly, if I forget not."

"Next, you must give me commission, under your royal signet, to raise for your use, and at your expense, one thousand free lances," replied Jodelle, stoutly, "engaged to serve you for the space of ten years. Moreover, I must have annually half the pay of Mercader; and you must consent to dub me knight with your royal hand."

"Knight!" cried the Earl of Pembroke, turning fiercely upon him.—"By the Lord! if the King do dub so mean and pitiful a traitor, I will either make the day of your dubbing the last of your life; or I will have my own scullion strike off my own spurs, as a dishonour to my heels, when such a villain wears the same."

"When those spurs *are* on, Lord Pembroke," replied Jodelle, boldly, "thou shalt not want one to meet thee, and give thee back scorn for scorn. Till then, meddle with what concerns thee, and mar not the King's success with thy scolding."

"Peace, Pembroke! peace!" cried King John, seeing his hasty peer about to make angry answer. "Who dare interfere where my will speaks?—And now tell me, fellow Alberic," he added, with an air of dignity he could sometimes assume, "suppose we refuse thine exacting demands—what follows then?"

"Why, that I betake myself to my beast's back, and ride away as I came," answered Jodelle, undisturbedly.

"But suppose we do not let thee go," continued the King; "and farther, suppose we hang thee up to the elm before the door."

"Then you will have broken a King's honour to win a dead carcase," answered the Brabançois; "for nothing shall you ever know from me that may stead you in your purpose."

"But we have tortures, sir, would almost make the dead speak," rejoined King John. "Such, at least, as would make thee wish thyself dead a thousand times, ere death came to thy relief."

"I doubt thee not, Sir King," answered Jodelle, with the same determined tone and manner in which he had heretofore spoken—"I doubt thee not; and, as I pretend to no more love for tortures than my neighbours, 'tis more than likely I should tell thee all I could tell, before the thumbscrew had taken half a turn; but it would avail thee nothing, for nought that I could tell thee would make my men withdraw till they have me amongst them; and, until they be withdrawn, you may as well try to surprise the sun of heaven, guarded by all his rays, as catch Prince Arthur and Guy de Coucy."

"Why wouldst thou not come to the camp, then?" demanded John. "If thou wert so secure, why camest thou not when I sent for thee?"

"Because, King John, I once served your brother Richard," replied the Brabançois, "and during that time I made myself so many dear friends in Mercader's band, that I thought if I came to visit them, without two or three hundred men at my back, they might, out of pure love, give me a banquet of cold steel, and lodging with our lady mother,—the earth."

"The fellow jests, lords! On my soul! the fellow jests!" cried John.—"Get thee back, sirrah, a step or two; and let me consult with my nobles," he added.—"Look to him, Pembroke, that he escapes not."

John then spoke for several minutes with the gentlemen who had attended him to this extraordinary meeting; and the conversation, though carried on in a low tone, seemed in no slight degree animated; more especially on the part of Lord Pembroke, who frequently spoke loud enough for such words to be heard as "disgrace to chivalry—disgust the barons of England—would not submit to have their order degraded," &c.

At length, however, a moment of greater calm succeeded; and John, beckoning the coterel forward, spoke to him thus:—

"Our determination is taken, good fellow, and thou shalt subscribe to it, or not, as thou wilt. First, we will give thee the order upon our treasury for the ten thousand marks of silver; always provided, that within ten days' time, the body of Arthur Plantagenet is by thy means placed in our hands—living—or dead," added the King, with a fearful emphasis on the last word. At the same time he contracted his brows, and though his eyes still remained fixed upon Jodelle, he half-closed the eyelids over them, as if he considered his own countenance as a mask through which his soul could gaze out without being seen, while he insinuated what he was afraid or ashamed to proclaim openly.

Lord Pembroke gave a meaning glance to another nobleman who stood behind the King; and who slightly raised his shoulder and drew down the corner of his mouth as a reply, while the King proceeded:—

"We will grant thee also, on the same condition, that which thou demandest in regard to raising a band of Brabançois, and serving as their commander, together with all the matter of pay, and whatever else you have mentioned on that head; but as to creating thee a knight, 'tis what we will not, nor cannot do, at least, for service of this kind. If you like the terms, well!" concluded the King; "if not, there stands an elm at the door, as we have before said, which would form as cool and shady a dangling place, as a man could wish to hang on in a September's day."

"Nay, I have no wish of the kind," replied the Brabançois: "if I must hang on any thing, let it be a King, not a stump of timber. I will not drive my bargain hard, Sir Knight. Sign me the papers now, with all the conditions you mention; and when I am your servant, I will do you such good service, that yon proud lord, who now stands in the way of my knighthood, shall own I deserve it as well as himself."

The Earl of Pembroke gave him a glance of scorn, but replied not to his boast; and writing materials having been procured from some of the attendants without—the whole house being by this time surrounded with armed men, who had been commanded to follow the King by different roads—the papers were drawn up, and signed by the King.

"And now, my lord," said Jodelle, with the boldness of a man who can render needful service, "look upon Prince Arthur as your own. Advance with all speed upon Mirebeau. When you are within five leagues, halt till night. Arthur, with the hogs of Poitou, is kinging it in the town. De Coucy sleeps by his watch-fire under the castle mound. My men keep the watch on this side of the town. Let your troops advance quietly in the dark, giving the word *Jodelle*, and, without sign or signal, my free fellows shall retire before you, till you are in the very heart of the place. Arthur, with his best knights, sleeps at the prévôt's house; surround that, and you have them all, without drawing a sword.—Love you the plan?"

"By my crown and honour!" cried the King, his eyes sparkling with delight, "if the plan be as well executed as it is devised, thou wilt merit a diamond worth a thousand marks, to weigh your silver down. Count upon me, good Alberic! as your best friend through life, if thy plot succeeds. Count on me, Alberic——"

"Jodelle! for the future, so please you, Sire," replied the coterel; "Alberic was but assumed:—and now, my lord, I will to horse and away; for I must put twenty long leagues between me and this place before the dawn of to-morrow."

"Speed you well!—speed you well, good Jodelle!" replied the King, rising: "I will away too, to move forward on Mirebeau, like an eagle to his prey. Come, lords! to horse!—Count on me, good Jodelle!" he repeated, as he put his foot in the stirrup, and turned away, "count on me—to hang you as high as the crow builds," he muttered to himself, as he galloped off—"ay, count on me for that! Well, lords, what think you of our night's work?—By Heaven! our enemies are in our hands! We have but to do, as I have seen a child catch flies,—sweep the board with our palm, and we grasp them all."

"True, my lord," replied the Earl of Pembroke, who had been speaking in a low voice with some of the other followers of the Prince. "But there are several things to be considered first."

"How to be considered, sir?" demanded King John, somewhat checking his horse's pace with an impatient start. "What is it now?—for I know by that word, *considered*, that there is some rebellion to my will, toward."

"Not so, Sire," replied the Earl of Pembroke, firmly; "but the barons of England, my liege, have to remember that, by direct line of descent, Arthur Plantagenet was the clear heir to Richard Cœur de Lion. Now, though there wants not reason or example to show that we have a right to choose from the royal family which member we think most fit to bear the sceptre; yet we so far respect the blood of our kings, and so far feel for the generous ardour of a noble youth who seeks but to regain a kingdom which he deems his of right, that we will not march against Arthur Plantagenet, without you, Sire, will promise to moderate your wrath towards him, to confirm him in his dukedom of Brittany, and to refrain from placing either your nephew, or any of his followers, in any strong place or prison, on pretext of guarding them."

John was silent for a long space, for his habitual dissimulation could hardly master the rage that struggled in his bosom. It conquered at last, however, and its triumph was complete.

"I will own I am grieved, Lord Pembroke," said he, in a hurt and sorrowful tone, "to think that my good English barons should so far doubt their King, as to approach the very verge of rebellion and disobedience, to obtain what he could never have a thought of denying. The promises you require, I give you as freely and as willingly as you could ask them; and if I fail to keep them in word and deed, let my orders be no longer obeyed; let my sceptre be broken, my crown torn from my head, and let me, by peer and peasant, be no longer regarded as a King."

"Thanks! my lord! thanks!" cried Lord Bagot and one or two of the other barons, who followed. "You are a free and noble sovereign, and a right loyal and excellent King. We thank you well for your free promise and accord."

Lord Pembroke was silent. He knew John profoundly, and he had never seen promises steadily kept, which had been so easily obtained.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Now, good dame, the reckoning," cried Jodelle, as soon as King John was gone.

"Good dame not me!" cried the hostess, forgetting, in her indignation at having been put out of her own kitchen, and kept for half an hour in the street amid soldiers and horseboys, all her habitual and universal civility. It might be shown by a learned dissertation, that there are particular points of pride in every human heart, of so inflammable a nature, that though we may bear insult and injury, attack and affront, upon every other subject, with the most forbearing consideration of our self-interest, yet but touch one of those points with the very tip of the brand of scorn, and the whole place is in a blaze in a moment, at the risk of burning the house down. But time is wanting; therefore, suffice it to say, that the landlady, who could bear, and had in her day borne all that woman can bear, was so indignant at being put from her own door—that stronghold of an innkeeper's heart, where he sees thousands arrive and depart without stirring a foot himself—that she vituperated the worthy Brabançois thereupon, somewhat more than his patience would endure.

"Come, come, old woman!" cried he, "an' thou wilt not name thy reckoning, no reckoning shalt thou have. I am not one of those who often pay either for man's food or horse provender, so I shall take my beast from the stall and set out."

"Nay, nay!" she said, more fearful of Jodelle discovering the page's horse still in the stable, than even of losing her reckoning —"nay! it should not be said that any one, however uncivil, was obliged to fetch his own horse. She had a boy for her stable, God wot!—Ho! boy!" she continued, screaming from the door, "Bring up the bay horse for the gentleman. Quick! — As to the reckoning, sir, it comes only to a matter of six sous."

The reckoning was paid, and before Jodelle could reach the stable, to which he was proceeding, notwithstanding the landlady's remonstrance, his horse was brought up, whereupon he mounted, and set off at full speed.

The moment the clatter of his horse's feet had passed away, the pile of fagots and brushwood rolled into the middle of the floor, and the half-suffocated page sprang out of his place of concealment. His face and hands were scratched and torn, and his dress was soiled to that degree, that the old lady could not refrain from laughing, till she saw the deadly paleness of his countenance.

"Get me a stoup of wine, good dame—get me a stoup of wine —I am faint and sad—get me some wine!" cried the youth. "Alack! that I, and no other, should have heard what I have heard!"

The old lady turned away to obey, and the page, casting himself on a settle before the fire, pressed his clasped hands between his knees, and sat gazing on the embers, with a bewildered and horrified stare, in which both fear and uncertainty had no small part.

"Good God! what shall I do?" cried he, at length. "If I go back to Sir Guy, and tell him that, though he ordered me to make all speed to the Count d'Auvergne, I turned out of my way to see Eleanor, because the pedlar told me she was at La Flêche, he will surely cleave my skull with his battle-axe, for neglecting the duty on which he sent me." And an aguish trembling seized the poor youth, as he thought of presenting himself to so dreadful a fate.

"And if I go not," added he, thoughtfully, "what will be the consequence? The triumph of a traitor—the destruction of my brave and noble master—the ruin of the Prince's enterprise. I will go. Let him do his worst — I will go. Little Eleanor can but lose her lover; and doubtless she will soon get another— and she will forget me, and be happy, I dare say;" and the tears filled his eyes, between emotion at the heroism of his own resolution, and the painful images his fancy called up, while thinking of her he loved. "But I will go," he continued—"I will go. He may kill me if he will; but I will save his life, at least. —Come, good dame! give me the wine!"

The poor page set the flagon to his lips, believing, like many another man, that if truth lies in a well, courage and resolution make their abode in a tankard. In the present instance, he found it marvellous true; and within a few minutes his determination was so greatly fortified, that he repeated the experiment, and soon drank himself into a hero.

"Now, good dame!—now I will go!" cried he. "Bid thy boy bring me my horse. And thank God, all your days, for putting me in that closet; for owing to that, one of the most diabolical schemes shall be thwarted that ever the devil himself helped to fabricate."

"The Lord be praised! and St. Luke and St. Martin the apostates!" cried the hostess; "and their blessing be upon your handsome face!—Your reckoning comes to nine sous, beau sire, which is cheap enough in all conscience, seeing I have nourished you as if you were my own son, and hid you in the cupboard as if you were my own brother."

The page did not examine very strictly the landlady's accounts; though, be it remarked, nine sous was in that day no inconsiderable sum; but, having partaken freely of the thousand marks which De Coucy had received before leaving Paris, he dispensed his money with the boyish liberality that too often leaves us with our very early years.

"Allons!" cried he, springing to his horse, "I will go, let what may come of it. Which way do I turn, dame, to reach Mirebeau?"

"To the left, beau page,—to the left!" replied the old woman. "But, Lord-a-mercy on thy sweet heart! 'tis a far way. Take the second road, that branches to the right, sir page," she screamed after him; "and then, where it separates again, keep to the left." But long ere she had concluded her directions, the youth was far out of hearing.

He rode on, and he rode on; and when the morning dawned, he found himself, with a weary horse and a sad heart, still in the sweet plains of bright Touraine. The world looked all gay and happy in the early light. There was a voice of rejoicing in the air, and a smile in the whole prospect, which went not well in harmony with the feelings of the poor youth's heart. Absorbed in his own griefs, and little knowing the universality of care, as he looked upon the merry sunshine streaming over the slopes and woods which laughed and sparkled in the rays, he fancied himself the only sorrowful thing in nature; and when he heard the clear-voiced lark rise upon her quivering wings, and fill the sky with her carolling, he dropped his bridle upon his horse's neck, and clasped his hand over his eyes. He was going, he thought, to give himself up to death:—to quit the sunshine, and the light, and the hopes of youth, and the enjoyments of fresh existence, for the cold charnel,—the dark, heavy grave, —the still, rigid, feelingless torpor of the dead!

Did his resolution waver? Did he ever dream of letting fate have its course with his lord and his enterprise, and, imitating the lark, to wing his flight afar, and leave care behind him? He did! He did, indeed, more than once; and the temptation was the stronger, as his secret would ever rest with himself—as neither punishment nor dishonour could ever follow, and as the upbraiding voice of conscience was all that he had to fear. The better spirit, however, of the chivalrous age came to his aid—that generous principle of self-devotion—that constantly inculcated contempt of life, where opposed to honour, which raised the ancient knight to a pitch of glory that the most calculating wisdom could never obtain, had its effect even in the bosom of the page; and, though never doubting that death would be the punishment of his want of obedience and discipline, he still went on to save his master and accuse himself.

It was not long, however, before the means presented itself, as he thought, of both sparing the confession, and circumventing the villanous designs of the Brabançois. As he rode slowly into a little village, about eight o'clock in the morning, he saw a horse tied to the lintel of a door, by the way-side, which he instantly recognised as Jodelle's, and he thanked St. Martin of Tours, as if this rencontre was a chance peculiarly of that saint's contriving. The plan of the page smacked strongly of the thirteenth century. "Here is the villain," said he, "refreshing at that house after his night's ride. Now, may the blessed St. Martin never be good to me again, if I do not attack him the moment he comes forth; and though he be a strong man, and twice as old as I am, I have encountered many a Saracen in the Holy Land, and, with God's blessing, I will kill the traitor, and so stop him in his enterprise. Then may I ride on merrily, to seek the Count d'Auvergne, and never mention a word of this plot of theirs, or of my own playing truant either."

Ermold de Marcy—for so was the page called—had a stout heart in all matters of simple battle, as ever entered a listed field; and had Jodelle been ten times as renowned a person as he was, Ermold would have attacked him without fear, though his whole heart sunk at the bare idea of offering himself to De

Coucy's battle-axe; so different is the prospect of contention, in which death may ensue, from the prospect of death itself.

Quietly moderating his horse's progress to the slowest possible pace, lest the noise of his hoofs should call Jodelle's attention, he advanced to the same cottage; and, not to take his adversary at an unjust disadvantage, he dismounted, and tied his beast to a post hard by. He then brought round his sword ready to his hand, loosened his dagger in the sheath, and went on towards the door; but, at that moment, the loud neighing of the Brabançois' courser, excited by the proximity of his fellow quadruped, called Jodelle himself to the door.

The instant he appeared, Ermold, without more ado, rushed upon him, and, striking him with his clenched fist, exclaimed, "You are a villain!" Then springing back into the middle of the road, to give his antagonist free space, he drew his sword with one hand, and his dagger with the other, and waited his approach.

For his part, Jodelle, who at once recognised De Coucy's attendant, had no difficulty in deciding on the course he had to pursue. The page evidently suspected him of something, though of what, Jodelle of course could not be fully aware. De Coucy believed him (as he had taken care to give out) to be lying wounded in one of the houses of Mirebeau. If the page, then, ever reached Mirebeau, his treachery would be instantly discovered, and his enterprise consequently fail. It therefore followed, that without a moment's hesitation, it became quite as much Jodelle's determination to put the page to death, as it was Ermold's to bestow the same fate on him; and, with this sanguinary resolution on both sides, they instantly closed in mortal conflict.

Although, on the first view, such a struggle between a youth of eighteen and a vigorous man of five-and-thirty would seem most unequal, and completely in favour of the latter, yet such was not entirely the case. Having served as page since a very early age, with so renowned a knight as Guy de Coucy, Ermold de Marcy had acquired not only a complete knowledge of the science of arms, but also that dexterity and agility in their use, which nothing but practice can give.

Practice also certainly Jodelle did not want; but Ermold's had been gained in the Holy Land, where the exquisite address of the Saracens in the use of the scymitar had necessitated additional study and exercise of the sword amongst the Crusaders and their followers.

Ermold also was as active as the wind, and this fully compensated the want of Jodelle's masculine strength. But the Brabançois had unfortunately in his favour the advantage of armour, being covered with a light hauberk,* which yielded to all the motions of his body, and with a steel bonnet, which defended his head; while the poor page had nothing but his green tunic, and his velvet cap and feather. It was in vain, therefore, that he exerted his skill and activity in dealing two blows for every one of his adversary's; the only accessible part of Jodelle's person was his face, and that he took sufficient care to guard against attack.

The noise of clashing weapons brought the villagers to their doors; but such things were too common in those days, and interference therein was too dangerous an essay for any one to meddle; though some of the women cried out upon the strong man in armour, for drawing on the youth in the green cassock.

Ermold was nothing daunted by the disadvantage under which he laboured; and after having struck at Jodelle's face, and parried all his blows, with admirable perseverance, for some minutes, he actually meditated running in upon the Brabançois, confident that if he could but get one fair blow at his throat, the combat would be at an end.

At that moment, however, it was interrupted in a different manner; for a party of horsemen, galloping up into the village, came suddenly upon the combatants, and thrusting a lance between them, separated them for the time.

"How now, masters! how now!" cried the leader of the party, in rank Norman-French. "Which is France, and which is England?—But fight fair! fight fair, i' God's name!—not a man against a boy, not a steel hauberk against a cloth jerkin. Take hold of them, Robin, and bring them in here. I will judge their quarrel."

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* There are various differences of opinion concerning the persons to whom the use of the hauberk was confined. Ducange implies, from a passage in Joinville, that this part of the ancient suits of armour was the privilege of a knight. Le Laboureur gives it also to a squire. But the Brabançois and other bands of adventurers did not subject themselves to any rules and regulations respecting their arms, as might be proved from a thousand different instances.

So saying, the English knight, for such he was who spoke, dismounted from his horse, and entered the very cottage from which Jodelle had issued a few minutes before. It seemed to be known as a place of entertainment, though no sign nor inscription announced the calling of its owner; and the knight, who bore the rough, weather-beaten face of an old bluff soldier, sat himself down in a settle, and leaning his elbow on the table, began to interrogate Ermold and the Brabançois, who were brought before him as he had commanded.

"And now, sir, with the hauberk," said he, addressing Jodelle, apparently with that sort of instinctive antipathy that the good sometimes feel, they scarce know why, towards the bad, "how came you, dressed in a coat of iron, to draw your weapon upon a beardless youth, with nothing to guard his limbs from your blows?"

"Though I deny your right to question me," replied Jodelle, "I will tell you, to make the matter short, that I drew upon him because he drew on me in the first place; but still more, because he is an enemy to my lord, the King of England."

"But thou art no Englishman, nor Norman either," replied the knight. "Thy tongue betrays thee. I have borne arms here, these fifty years, from boyhood to old age, and I know every jargon that is spoken in the King's dominions, from Rouen to the mountains; and thou speakest none. Thou art a Frenchman, of Provence, or thine accent lies."

"I may be a Frenchman, and yet serve the King of England," replied Jodelle, boldly.

"God send him better servants than thou art, then!" replied the old knight.—"Well, boy, what sayest thou? Nay, look not sad, for that matter. We will not hurt thee, lad."

"You will hurt me, and you do hurt me," answered Ermold, "if you hold me here, and do not let me either cut out that villain's heart, or on to tell my lord that he is betrayed."

"And who is thy lord, boy?" demanded the knight,—"English or French?—and what is his name?"

"French!" answered Ermold, boldly; and with earnest pride he added, "he is the noble Sir Guy de Coucy."

"A good knight!—a good knight!" said the Englishman.

"I have heard the heralds tell of him. A crusader too—young, they say, but very bold, and full of noble prowess: I should like to splinter a lance with him, in faith!"

"You need not balk your liking, sir knight," answered the page at once: "my master will meet you on horseback, or on foot, with what arms you will, and when:—give me but a glove to bear him as a gage, and you shall not be long without seeing him."

"Thou bearest thee like the page of such a knight," replied the Englishman; "and in good truth, I have a mind to pleasure thee," he added, drawing off one of his gauntlets, as if about to send it to De Coucy; but whether such was his first intention or not, his farther determinations were changed by Jodelle demanding abruptly—"Know you the signature of King John, sir knight?"

"Surely! somewhat better than my own," answered the other,—"somewhat better than my own, which I have not seen for these forty years; and which, please God! I shall never see again; for my last will and testament, which was drawn by the holy clerk of St. Anne's, two years and a half come St. Michael's, was stamped with my sword pommel, seeing that I had forgot how to write one half the letters of my name, and the others were not readable.—But as to the King's, I'd swear to *it*."

"Well then," said Jodelle, laying a written paper before him, "you must know that; and by that name I require you not only to let me pass free, but to keep yon youth prisoner, as an enemy to the King."

"'Tis sure enough the King's name, in his own writing; and there is the great seal too," said the old knight. "This will serve your turn, sir, as far as going away yourself,—but as to keeping the youth, I know nothing of that. The paper says nothing of that, as far as I can see."

"No, it does not," said Jodelle; "but still——"

"Oh, it does not, does not it?" said the Englishman, giving back the paper. "Thank you, at least, for that admission; for, as to what the paper says, may I be confounded if I can read a word of it."

"Listen to me, however," said Jodelle; and, approaching close to the English knight, he whispered a few words in his ear.

The old man listened for a moment, with a grave and attentive face, bending his head and inclining his ear to the Brabançois' communication. Then suddenly he turned round, and eyed him from head to foot with a glance of severe scorn. "Open the door!" cried he, to his men, loudly—"open the door! By God, I shall be suffocated!—I never was in a small room with such a damned rascal in my life before. Let him pass! let him pass! and keep out of the way—take care his clothes do not touch you—it may be contagious; and, by the Lord! I would sooner catch the plague than such villany as he is tainted withal."

While surprised, and at first scarce grasping their leader's meaning, the English troopers drew back from the Brabançois' path, as if he had been really a leper, Jodelle strode to the door of the cottage, smothering the wrath he dared not vent. On the threshold, however, he paused; and, turning towards the old soldier as if he would speak, glared on him for a moment with the glance of a wounded tiger; but, whether he could find no words equal to convey the virulence of his passion, or whether prudence triumphed over anger, cannot be told, but he broke suddenly away, and catching his horse's bridle, sprang into the saddle, and rode off at full speed.

"I am afraid I must keep thee, poor youth," said the old knight,—"I am afraid I must keep thee, whether I will or no. I should be blamed if I let thee go; though, on my knightly honour, 'tis cursed hard to be obliged to keep a good honest youth like thee, and let a slave like that go free! Nevertheless, you must stay here; and if you try to make your escape, I do not know what I must do to thee. Robin," he continued, turning to one of his men-at-arms, "put him into the back chamber that looks upon the lane, and keep a good guard over him, while I go on to the other village to see that Lord Pembroke's quarters be prepared:—and hark ye," he added, speaking in a lower voice, "leave the window open, and tie his horse under it, and there is a gros Tournois for thee to drink the King's health with the villagers and the other soldiers. Do you understand?"

"Ay, sir! ay!" answered the man-at-arms, "I understand, and will take care that your worship's commands be obeyed."

"'Tis a good youth," said the old knight, "and a bold; and the other was nothing but a pitiful villain, that will be hanged yet, if there be a tree in France to hang him on. Now, though I might be blamed if I let this lad go, and John might call me a hard-headed old fool, as once he did; yet I don't know, Robin,—I don't know whether in knightly honour I should keep the true man prisoner, and let the traitor go free—I don't know, Robin—I don't know!"

So saying, the good old soldier strode to the door: and the man he called Robin took poor Ermold into a small room at the back of the house, where he opened the window, saying something about not wishing to stifle him, and then left him, fastening the door on the other side.

The poor page, however, bewildered with disappointment and distress, and stupified with fatigue and want of sleep, had only heard the charge to guard him safely, without the after whisper, which neutralized that command; and, never dreaming that escape was possible, he sat down on the end of a truckle bed that occupied the greater part of the chamber, and gave himself up to his own melancholy thoughts. He once, indeed, thought of looking from the window with a vague idea of freeing himself; but as he was about to proceed thither, the sound of a soldier whistling, together with a horse's footsteps, convinced him that a guard was stationed there, and he abandoned his purpose. In this state he remained till grief and weariness proved too heavy for his young eyelids, and he fell asleep.

In the meanwhile, the old knight, after being absent for more than three hours, returned to the village, which he had apparently often frequented before, and riding up to his man Robin, who was drinking with some peasants in the market-place, his first question was, "Where is the prisoner, Robin? I hope he has not escaped;" while a shrewd smile very potently contradicted the exact meaning of his words.

"Escaped!" exclaimed Robin; "God bless your worship! he cannot have escaped, without he got out of the window! for I left five men drinking in the front room."

"Let us see, Robin,—let us see!" said the old man. "Nothing like making sure, good Robin:" and he spurred on to the cottage, sprang from his horse like a lad; and, casting the bridle to one of his men, passed through the front room to that where poor Ermold was confined.

Whatever had been his expectations, when he saw him sitting on the bed, just opening his heavy eyes at the sound of his approach, he could not restrain a slight movement of impatience. "The boy's a fool!" muttered he,—the boy's a fool!" But then, recovering himself, he shut the door, and, advancing to the page, he said,—"I am right glad thou hast not tried to escape, my boy,—thou art a good lad and a patient; but if ever thou shouldst escape, while under my custody, for 'tis impossible to guard every point, remember to do my greeting to your lord, and tell him that I, Sir Arthur of Oakingham, will be glad to splinter a lance with him, in all love and courtesy."

The page opened his eyes wide, as if he could scarce believe what he heard.

"If he does not understand that," said the old man, to himself, "he is a natural fool!" But to make all sure, he went to the narrow window, and leaning out, after whistling for a minute, he asked. "Is that your horse? 'Tis a bonny beast, and a swift, doubtless. Well, sir page, fare thee well!" he added: "in an hour's time I will send thee a stoup of wine, to cheer thee!" and, without more ado, he turned, and left the room once more, bolting the door behind him.

Ermold stood for a moment, as if surprise had benumbed his sinews; but 'twas only for a moment; for then, springing towards the casement, he looked out well on each side, thrust himself through, without much care either of his dress or his person; and springing to the ground, was in an instant on his horse's back, and galloping away over the wide, uninclosed country, like Tam o' Shanter with all the witches behind him.

For long he rode on, without daring to look behind; but when he did so, he found that he was certainly unpursued; and proceeded, with somewhat of a slackened pace, in order to save his horse's strength. At the first cottage he came to, he inquired for Mirebeau; but by the utter ignorance of the serfs that inhabited it, even of the name of such a place, he found that he must be rather going away from the object of his journey than approaching it. At the castles he did not dare to ask; for the barons of that part of the country were so divided between the two parties, that he would have thereby run fully as much chance of being detained as directed. At length, however, as the sun began to decline, he encountered a countrywoman, who gave him some more correct information; but told him at the same time, that it would be midnight before he reached the place he sought.

Ermold went on undauntedly; and only stopped for half an hour, to refresh his horse when the weary beast could hardly move its limbs. Still he was destined to be once more turned from his path: for, at the moment the sun was just going down, he beheld, from the top of one of the hills, a large body of cavalry moving on in the valley below; and the banners and ensigns which flaunted in the horizontal rays, left no doubt that they were English.

The page was of course obliged to change his direction; but as a fine starry night came on, he proceeded with greater ease; for the woman's direction had been to keep due south, and in Palestine he had learned to travel by the stars. A thousand difficulties still opposed themselves to his way—a thousand times his horse's weariness obliged him to halt; but he suffered not his courage to be shaken; and, at last, he triumphed over all. As day began to break, he heard the ringing of a large church bell, and in ten minutes he stood upon the heights above Mirebeau. Banners, and pennons, and streamers were dancing in the vale below; and for a moment the page paused and glanced his eyes over the whole scene. As he did so, he turned as pale as death; and, suddenly drawing his rein, he wheeled to the right, and rode away in another direction, as fast as his weary horse would bear him.

CHAPTER XXVII.

We seldom, in life, find ourselves more unpleasantly situated, than when, as is often the case, our fate and happiness are staked upon an enterprise in which many other persons are joined, whose errors or negligences counteract all our best endeavours, and whose conduct, however much we disapprove, we cannot command.

Such was precisely the case with De Coucy, after the taking of the town of Mirebeau. The castle still held out, and laughed the efforts of their small force to scorn. Their auxiliaries had not yet come up. No one could gain precise information of the movements of King John's army; and yet, the knights of Poitou and Anjou passed their time in revelling and merriment in the town, pressing the siege of the castle vigorously during the day, but giving up the night to feasting and debauchery, and leading Prince Arthur, in the heedlessness of his youth, into the same improvident neglect as themselves.

When De Coucy urged the hourly danger to which they were exposed during the night, with broken gates and an unrepaired wall, and pressed the necessity of throwing out guards and patrols, the only reply he obtained was, "Let the Brabançois patrol,—they were paid for such tedious service. They were excellent scouts too. None better! Let them play sentinel. The knights and men-at-arms had enough to do during the day. As to King John, who feared him? Let him come. They would fight him." So confident had they become from their first success against Mirebeau. De Coucy, however, shared not this confidence; but every night, as soon as the immediate operations against the castle had ceased, he left the wounded in the town, and retired, with the rest of his followers, to a small post he had established on a mound, at the distance of a double arrow shot from the fortress. His first care after this, was to distribute the least fatigued of the Brabançois, in small parties, round the place, at a short distance from the walls; so that, as far as they could be relied upon, the besiegers were secure against attack.

Still the young knight, practised in the desultory warfare of the crusades, and accustomed to every sort of attack, both by night and day, neglected no precaution; and, by establishing a patrol of his own tried attendants, each making the complete round of the posts once during the night; while De Coucy himself never omitted to make the same tour twice between darkness and light, he seemed to ensure also the faith of the Brabançois.

The fourth night had come, after the taking of the town; and, wearied with the fatigues of the day, De Coucy had slept for an hour or two, in one of the little huts of which he had formed his encampment. He was restless, however, even during his sleep, and towards eleven of the clock he rose, and proceeded to the watch-fire, at a short distance from which, the man who was next to make the round, was sitting waiting his companion's return. The night was as black as ink; there was a sort of solid darkness in the air; but withal it was very warm; so that, though the light of the fire was very agreeable, its heat was not to be supported.

"Has all gone well?" demanded the knight.

"All, beau sire," answered the man, "except that one of the coterel's horses has got his foot in a hole, and slipped his fetlock."

"Have you heard of his captain, Jodelle?" demanded De Coucy. "Is he better of his hurt? We want all the men we have."

"I have not seen him, beau sire, because I have not been in the town," replied the squire; "but one of his fellows says, that he is very bad indeed;—that the blow you dealt him has knocked one of his eyes quite out."

"I am sorry for that," said De Coucy. "I meant not to strike so heavily. I will see him to-morrow before the attack. Bring me word, in the morning, what house he lies at; and now mount and begin your round, good Raoul. We will keep it up quickly to-night. I know not why, but I am not easy. I have a sort of misgiving that I seldom feel. Hush! What noise is that!"

"Oh, 'tis the folks singing in the town, beau sire," replied the man. "They have been at it this hour. It comes from the prévôt's garden. I heard Sir Savary de Mauléon say, as he rode by us, that he would sing the abbess of the convent a lay to-night, for the love of her sweet eyes."

A gust of wind now brought the sounds nearer; and De Coucy heard, more distinctly, that it was as the man-at-arms had said. The dull tones of a rote, with some voices singing, mingled with the merry clamour of several persons laughing; and the general hum of more quiet conversation told that the gay nobles of Poitou were prolonging the revel late.

De Coucy bade the man go; and in a few minutes after, when the other, who had been engaged in making the rounds, returned, the knight himself mounted a fresh horse, and rode round in various directions, sometimes visiting the posts, sometimes pushing his search into the country; for, with no earthly reason for suspicion, he felt more troubled and anxious than if some inevitable misfortune were about to fall upon him. At about three in the morning he returned, and found Hugo de Barre, by the light of the watch-fire, waiting his turn to ride on the patrol.

"How is thy wound, Hugo?" demanded De Coucy, springing to the ground.

"Oh, 'tis nothing, Sir Guy!—'tis nothing!" replied the stout squire. "God send me never worse than that, and my bargain would be soon made!"

"Has all been still?" demanded the knight.

"All, save a slight rustling I thought I heard on yonder hill," replied Hugo. "It sounded like a far horse's feet."

"Thou hast shrewd ears, good Hugo," answered his lord. "'Twas I rode across it some half an hour ago or less."

"'Tis that the night is woundy still," replied the squire; "one might hear a fly buzz at a mile; 'tis as hot as Palestine too. Think you, beau sire," he added, somewhat abruptly, "that 'twill be long before this castle falls?"

"Nine months and a day! good Hugo," answered the knight, —"nine months and a day! without our reinforcements come up. How would you have us take it? We have no engines. We have neither mangonel, nor catapult, nor pierrier to batter the wall, nor ladders nor moving tower to storm it."

"I would fain be on to La Flêche, beau sire," said Hugo, laughing. "'Tis that makes me impatient."

"And why to La Flêche?" demanded De Coucy. "Why there, more than to any other town of Maine or Normandy?"

"Oh, I forgot, sire. You were not there," said the squire, "when the packman at Tours told Ermold de Marcy and me, that Sir Julian, and the Lady Isadore, and Mistress Alixe, and little Eleanor, and all, are at La Flêche."

"Ha!" said De Coucy, "and this cursed castle is keeping us here for ages, and those wild knights of Poitou lying there in the town, and spending the time in foolish revel that would take twenty castles if well employed."

"That is what Gallon the fool said yesterday," rejoined Hugo. "God forgive me for putting you, sire, and Gallon together: but he said, 'If those Poitevins would but dine as heartily on stone walls as they do on cranes and capons, and toss off as much water as they do wine, they would drink the ditch dry, and swallow the castle, before three days were out.'"

"On my life, he said not amiss," replied De Coucy.—"Where is poor Gallon? I have not seen him these two days."

"He keeps to the town, beau sire," replied Hugo, "to console the good wives, as he says. But here comes Henry Carvel from the rounds, or I am mistaken. Yet the night is so dark, one would not see a camel at a yard's distance. Ho, stand! Give the word!"

"Arthur!" replied the soldier, and dismounted by the watch-fire. Hugo de Barre sprang on his horse, and proceeded on his round; while De Coucy, casting himself down in the blaze, prepared to watch out the night by the sentinel, who was now called to the guard.

It were little amusing to trace De Coucy's thoughts. A knight of that day would have deemed it almost a disgrace to divide the necessary anxieties of the profession of arms, with any other idea than that of his lady love. However the caustic pen of Cervantes, whose chivalrous spirit—of which, I am bold to say, no man ever originally possessed more—had early been crushed by ingratitude and disappointment, however his pen may have given an aspect of ridicule to the deep devotion of the ancient knights towards the object of their love, however true it may be that that devotion was not always of as pure a kind as fancy has portrayed it; yet the love of the chivalrous ages was a far superior feeling to the calculating transaction so termed in the present day; and if, perhaps, it was rude in its forms and extravagant in its excess, it had at least the energy of passion, and the sublimity of strength. De Coucy watched and listened; but still, while he did so, he thought of Isadore of the Mount, and he called up her loveliness, her gentleness, her affection. Every glance of her soft dark eyes, every tone of her sweet lip, was food for memory; and the young knight deemed that surely for such glances and such tones a brave man might conquer the world.

The night, as we have seen, had been sultry, and the sky dark; and it was now waxing towards morning; but no cool breeze announced the fresh rising of the day. The air was heavy and close, as if charged with the matter for a thousand storms; and the wind was as still as if no quickening wing had ever stirred the thick and lazy atmosphere. Suddenly a sort of rolling sound seemed to disturb the air, and De Coucy sprang upon his feet to listen. A moment of silence elapsed, and then a bright flash of lightning blazed across the sky, followed by a clap of thunder. De Coucy listened still. "It could not be distant thunder," he thought,—"the sound he had first heard. He had seen no previous lightning."

He now distinctly heard a horse's feet coming towards him; and, a moment after, the voice of Hugo de Barre speaking to some one else. "Come along, Sir Gallon, quick!" cried he. "You must tell it to my lord himself. By Heaven! if 'tis a jest, you should not have made it; and if 'tis not a jest, he must hear it."

"Ha, haw!" cried Gallon the fool.—"Ha, haw! If 'tis a jest, 'tis the best I ever made, for it is true,—and truth is the best jest in the calendar.—Why don't they make Truth a saint, Hugo? Haw, haw! Haw, haw! When I'm pope, I'll make St. Truth to match St. Ruth; and when I've done I shall have made the best saint of the pack.—Haw, haw! Haw, haw! But, by the Lord! some one will soon make St. Lie to spite me; and no one will pray to St. Truth afterwards.—Haw! haw! haw!—But there's De Coucy standing by the watch-fire, like some great devil in armour, broiling the souls of the damned.—Haw! haw! haw!"

"What is the matter, Hugo?" cried the knight, advancing. "Why are you dragging along poor Gallon so?"

"Because poor Gallon lets him," cried the juggler, freeing himself from the squire's grasp, by one of his almost supernatural springs. "Haw, haw! Where's poor Gallon now?"—and he bounded up to the place where the knight stood, and cast himself down by the fire, exclaiming,—"Oh rare! 'Tis a sweet fire in this sultry night.—Haw, haw! Are you cold, De Coucy?"

"I am afraid, my lord, there is treason going forward," said Hugo de Barre, riding up to his master, and speaking in a low voice. "I had scarce left you when Gallon came bounding up to me, and began running beside my horse, saying, in his wild way he would tell me a story. I heeded him little at first; but when he began to tell me that this Brabançois—this Jodelle—has not been lying wounded a-bed, but has been away these two days on horseback, and came back into the town towards dusk last night, I thought it right to bring him hither."

"You did well," cried De Coucy,—"you did well! I will speak with him—I observed some movement amongst the Brabançois as we returned. Go quietly, Hugo, and give a glance into their huts, while I speak with the juggler.—Ho, good Gallon, come hither!"

"You won't beat me?" cried Gallon,—"ha?"

"Beat thee! no, on my honour!" replied De Coucy; and the mad juggler crept up to him on all-fours.—"Tell me, Gallon," continued the knight, "is what you said to Hugo true about Jodelle?"

"The good King Christopher had a cat!" replied Gallon. "You said you would not beat me, Coucy; but your eyes look very like as if your fist itched to give the lie to your honour."

"Nay, nay, Gallon," said De Coucy, striving by gentleness to get a moment of serious reason from him. "My own life—the safety of the camp—of Prince Arthur—of our whole party, may depend upon your answer. I have heard you say that you are a Christian man, and kept your faith, even while a slave amongst the Saracens; now answer me—Do you know for certain that Jodelle has been absent, as you told your friend Hugo? Speak the truth, upon your soul!"

"Not upon my soul!—not upon my soul!" cried Gallon. "As to my having a soul, that is all a matter of taste and uncertainty; but what I said was true, upon my nose, which no one will deny—Turk or Christian, fool or philosopher. On my nose, it was true, Coucy—on my nose."

"By Heaven! if this prove false, I will cut it off!" cried the knight, frowning on him.

"Do so, do so! beau sire," replied Gallon, grinning; "and when you have got it, God give you grace to wear it!"

"Now, Hugo de Barre!" cried the knight, as his squire returned with a quick pace.

"As I hope for salvation, Sir Guy," cried Hugo, "there are not ten of the cotereaux in the huts! Those that are there, are sleeping quietly enough, but all the rest are gone!"

"Lord! what a flash!" cried Gallon, as the lightning gleamed round about them, playing on the armour of De Coucy and his squire.

"Ha, Hugo! did you see nothing in that valley?" exclaimed the knight.

"Lances, as I live!" answered the squire. "We are betrayed to the English, sire!"

"We may reach the town yet, and save the Prince!" exclaimed the knight. "Wake the vassals, and the Brabançois that are left! The traitor thought them too true to be trusted: we will think them true too.—Be quick, but silent! Bid them not speak a word!"

Each man started up in his armour, as he was awoke; for De Coucy had not permitted them to disarm during the siege; and, being ranged in silence behind the knight, the small party that were left began to descend towards the town on foot, and unknowing what duty they were going upon.

Between the castle and the hill on which De Coucy had established his post, was a small ravine, the entrance of which, nearest the town, exactly fronted the breach that he had formerly effected in the wall. In the bottom ran a quick but shallow stream, which, brawling amongst some large stones, went on murmuring towards the castle, the ditch of which it supplied with water. Leading his men down into the hollow, the young knight took advantage of the stream, and by making his soldiers advance through the water, covered the clank of their armour with the noise of the rivulet. The most profound darkness hung upon their way; but, during the four days they had been there, each man had become perfectly acquainted with the ground, so that they were advancing rapidly, when suddenly a slight measured sound, like the march of armed men over soft turf, caused De Coucy to halt. "Stop!" whispered he; "they are between us and the walls. We shall have a flash presently. Down behind the bushes, and we shall see!"

As he expected, it was not long before the lightning again blazed across, and showed them a strong body of infantry marching along in line, between the spot where he stood and the walls.

"Hugo," whispered the knight, "we must risk all. They are surrounding the town; but the southern gate must still be open. We must cut through them, and may still save the Prince. Let each man remember his task is, to enter the house of the prévôt, and carry Arthur Plantagenet out, whether he will or not, by the southern gate. A thousand marks of silver to the man who sets him in the streets of Paris;—follow silently till I give the word."

This was said like lightning; and leading onward with a quick but cautious step, De Coucy had advanced so far that he could hear the footfall of each armed man in the enemy's ranks, and the rustling of their close pressed files against each other, when the blaze of the lightning discovered his party also to those against whom they were advancing. It gleamed as brightly as if the flash had been actually between them, showing to De Coucy the corslets and pikes and grim faces of the English soldiers within twenty yards of where he stood; while they suddenly perceived a body of armed men approaching towards them, whose numbers the duration of the lightning was not sufficient to display.

"A Coucy! a Coucy!" shouted the knight, giving the signal to advance, and rushing forward with that overwhelming impetuosity which always casts so much in favour of the attacking party. Unacquainted with the ground, taken by surprise, uncertain to whom or to what they were opposed, the Norman and English soldiers, for the moment, gave way in confusion. Two went down in a moment before De Coucy's sword; a third attempted to grapple with him, but was dashed to the earth in an instant; a fourth retired fighting towards the wall.

De Coucy pressed upon him as a man whose all—honour, fortune, existence—is staked upon his single arm. Hugo and his followers thronged after, widening the breach he had hewn in the enemy's ranks. The soldier who fronted him, struck wild, reeled, staggered under his blows, and stumbling over the ruins of the fallen tower, was trodden under his feet. On rushed De Coucy towards the breach, seeing nought in the darkness, hearing nought in the tumult his quick and bloody passage had occasioned.

But suddenly the bright blue lightning flashed once more across his path. What was it he beheld? The lion banner of England planted in the breach, with a crowd of iron forms around it, and a forest of spears shining from beyond.

"Back! back, my lord!" cried Hugo; "the way is clear behind;—back to the hill, while we can pass!"

Back like lightning De Coucy trod his steps, but with a different order of march from what he had pursued in advancing. Every man of his train went now before him; and though his passage had been but for an instant, and the confusion it had occasioned great, yet the English soldiers were now pressing in upon him on all sides, and hard was the task to clear himself of their ranks. The darkness, however, favoured him, and his superior knowledge of the ground; and, hastening onward, contenting himself with striking only where his passage was opposed, he gradually fought his way out—foiled one or two that attempted to pursue him—gained the hill, and, mounting it with the swiftness of an arrow sped from the bow, he at length rallied his men in the midst of the little huts in which he had lodged his soldiers after the taking of the town.

"Haw, haw! beau sire! Haw, haw!" cried Gallon the fool, who had never stirred from the fire, although the heat was intense; "so you have come back again. But I can tell you that if you like to go down the other way, you may have just as good a dish of fighting, for I saw, but now, the postern of the castle open, and a whole troop of spears wind down behind us. Haw, haw! haw, haw!"

"Now for the last chance, Hugo!" cried the knight.—"To horse, to horse!"

Each man detached his beast from the spot where they stood ready, and sprang into the saddle, doubting not that their daring leader was about to attempt to cut his way through; but De Coucy had very different thoughts.

"There is the day breaking," cried he; "we must be quick. In the confusion that must reign in the town the Prince may escape, if we can but draw the Normans' attention hitherward. Gallon, a fitting task for you! Take some of those brands, and set fire to all the huts. Quick! the day is rising!"

"Haw, haw!" cried Gallon, delighted.—"Haw, haw!" and in an astonishingly short space of time he had contrived to communicate the flame to the greater part of the hovels, which, constructed principally of dry branches, were easily ignited.

"Now!" cried De Coucy, "each man his horn to his lips! and let him blow a flourish, as if he were saluting the royal standard."

De Coucy himself set the example, and the long, loud, united notes rang far over the town.

So far as calling the attention of the English army below, the plan perfectly succeeded; and indeed, even made the greater part both of the knights and men-at-arms believe that Arthur was without the town.

All eyes were turned now towards the little hill, where, clearly defined in the red light of the burning huts, stood the small party of horsemen, hanging a dark black spot upon the very verge, backed by the blaze of the conflagration. They might easily be mistaken for a group of knights; and a little wood of birches some way behind, looked not unlike a considerable clump of spears. To such a point, indeed, was Lord Pembroke himself deceived, that he judged it fit to move a strong body of horse round to the right of the hill, thus hemming in the knight between the town and the castle.

De Coucy saw the movement, and rejoiced in it. Nor did he move a step, as long as the fire of the huts continued to blaze; wishing, as far as possible, to embarrass the enemy by the singularity of his behaviour, in the faint hope that every additional cause of confusion, joined to those which must always attend a night attack, might in some degree facilitate the escape of the Prince.

The fire, however, expired, and the grey light of the morning was beginning to spread more and more over the scene, when De Coucy turned his rein, and, skirting round the little birch wood we have mentioned, at last endeavoured to force his way through the iron toils that were spread around him. To the right, as he wheeled round the wood, the early light showed the strong body of cavalry Lord Pembroke had thrown forward. On his left now lay the castle, and straight before him a body of archers that had issued from thence, with the Earl of Salisbury and half a dozen knights at their head. De Coucy hesitated not a moment, but laid his lance in the rest, and galloped forward to the attack of the latter at full speed.

One of the knights rode out before the rest to meet him, but went down, horse and man, before his spear, and rolled on the plain, with the iron of the lance broken off deep in his breast. On spurred De Coucy, swinging his battle-axe over the head of a Norman who followed, when his horse, unfortunately, set his foot on the carcass of the fallen man—slipped—fell irrecoverably, and the knight was hurled to the ground.

He sprang on his feet, however, in a moment, and, catching the bridle of Lord Salisbury's horse, dashed the iron chamfron to atoms with his battle-axe, and hurled the animal reeling on his haunches. The Earl spurred up his charger. "Yield!

yield, De Coucy!" cried he;—"Good treatment! fair ransom! William's friendship! Yield you, or you die!"

"Never!" exclaimed De Coucy, turning; and at a single blow striking down a man on foot that pressed upon him behind;—"never will I be John of England's prisoner!"

"Be Salisbury's!—be William Longsword's!" shouted the Earl, loudly, eager to save his noble foe from the lances that were now bearing him down on all sides. But De Coucy still raged like a lion in the toils; and, alone in the midst of his enemies—for the ranks had closed round and cut him off even from the aid of his little band—he continued for many minutes to struggle with a host, displaying that fearful courage which gained him a name throughout all Europe.

At length, however, while pressed upon in front by three lances, a powerful man-at-arms behind him raised above his head a mace that would have felled Goliah. The knight turned his head; but to parry it was impossible, for both his sword and shield arms were busy in defending himself from the spears of the enemy in front; and he must have gone down before the blow like a felled ox, had not Lord Salisbury sprung to the ground, and interposed the shield which hung round his own neck, in a slanting direction, between the tremendous mace and De Coucy's helmet. The blow, however, fell; and, though turned aside by William Longsword's treble target, its descent drove the Earl's arm down upon De Coucy's head, and made them both stagger.

"Salisbury, I yield me!" cried De Coucy, dropping his battle-axe: "rescue or no rescue, generous enemy, I am thy true prisoner; and thereunto I give thee my faith. But, as thou art a knight and a noble, yield me not to thy bad brother John. We know too well how he treats his prisoners."

"Salisbury's honour for your surety, brave De Coucy!" replied the Earl, clasping him in his mailed arms, and giving a friendly shake, as if in reproach for the long-protracted struggle he had maintained. "By the Lord! old friend, when you fought by my side in Palestine, you were but a whelp, where you are now a lion! But know ye not yet, the town has been in our hands this hour, and my fair nephew Arthur taken in his bed, with all the wild revellers of Poitou, as full of wine as leathern bottles?"

"Alas! I fear for the Prince!" cried De Coucy, "in his bad uncle's hands."

"Hush! hush!" replied Salisbury. "John is my brother, though I be but a bastard. He has pledged his word, too, I hear, to treat his nephew nobly. So let us to the town, where we shall hear more. In the meanwhile, however, let me send to the Earl of Pembroke; for, by the manœuvres he is making, he seems as ignorant of what has taken place in the town as you were. Now let us on."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

We must change the scene once more, and return to the palace of Philip Augustus. The whirlwind of passion had passed by; but the deep pangs of disappointed expectation, with a long train of gloomy suspicions and painful anticipations, swelled in the bosom of the monarch, like those heavy, sweeping billows which a storm leaves behind on the long-agitated sea.

Philip Augustus slowly mounted the stairs of the great keep of the castle, pausing at every two or three steps, as if even the attention necessary to raise his foot from the one grade to the other interrupted the deep current of his thoughts. So profound, indeed, were those thoughts, that he never even remarked the presence of Guerin, till at length, at the very door of the Queen's apartments, the minister beseeched him to collect himself.

"Remember, sire," said the bishop, "that no point of the lady's conduct is reproachable; and, for Heaven's sake! yield not your noble mind to any fit of passion that you may repent of hereafter."

"Fear not, Guerin," replied the King: "I am as cool as snow;" and opening the door, he pushed aside the tapestry and entered.

Agnes had heard the step, but it was so different from her husband's general pace, that she had not believed it to be his. When she beheld him, however, a glow of bright, unspeakable joy, which in itself might have convinced the most suspicious, spread over her countenance.

Philip was not proof against it; and as she sprang forward to meet him, he kissed her cheek, and pressed her in the wonted embrace. But there is nought so pertinacious on earth as suspicion. 'Tis the fiend's best, most persevering servant. Cast it from us with what force we will—crush it under what weight of reasoning we may, once born in the human heart, it still rises on its invisible ladder, and squeezes its little drop of corroding poison into every cup we drink.

The Queen's women left the room, and Philip sat down by the embroidery frame where Agnes had been working before she went out. He still held her hand in his, as she stood beside him; but fixing his eyes upon the embroidery, he was in a moment again lost in painful thought, though his hand every now and then contracted on the small fingers they grasped, with a sort of habitual fondness.

Agnes was surprised and pained at this unwonted mood; and yet she would not deem it coldness, or say one word that might irritate her husband's mind; so that for long she left him to think in silence, seeing that something most agonizing must evidently have happened, so to absorb his ideas, even beside her.

At length, however, without making a motion to withdraw her hand, she sunk slowly down upon her knees beside him; and, gazing up in his face, she asked, "Do you not love me, Philip?" in a low, sweet tone, that vibrated through his soul to all the gentler and dearer feelings of his heart.

"Love you, Agnes!" cried he, throwing his arms round her beautiful form, and pressing kiss upon kiss on her lips—"love you! Oh God! how deeply!" He gazed on her face for a moment or two, with one of those long, straining, wistful glances that we sometimes give to the dead; then, starting up, he paced the room for several minutes, murmuring some indistinct words to himself, till at length his steps grew slower again, his lips ceased to move, and he once more fell into deep meditation.

Agnes rose, and, advancing towards him, laid her hand affectionately upon his arm. "Calm yourself, Philip. Come and sit down again, and tell your Agnes what has disturbed you. Calm yourself, beloved! Oh, calm yourself!"

"Calm, madam!" said the King, turning towards her with an air of cold abstraction. "How would you have me calm?"

Agnes let her hand drop from his arm; and, returning to her seat, she bent her head down and wept silently.

Philip took another turn in the chamber, during which he twice turned his eyes upon the figure of his wife—then advanced towards her, and leaning down, cast his arm over her neck. "Weep not, dear Agnes," he said,—"weep not; I have many things to agitate and distress me. You must bear with me, and let my humour have its way."

Agnes looked up, and kissed the lips that spoke to her, through her tears. She asked no questions, however, lest she might recall whatever was painful to her husband's mind. Philip, too, glanced not for a moment towards the real cause of his agitation. There was something so pure, so tender, so beautiful, in the whole conduct and demeanour of his wife—so full of the same affection towards him that he felt towards her—so unmixed with the least touch of that constraint that might make her love doubted, that his suspicions stood reproved, and though they rankled still, he dared not own them.

"Can it be only a feeling of cold duty binds her to me thus?" he asked himself; "she cited nought else to support her resolution of not flying with that pale seducer, D'Auvergne; and yet, see how she strives for my affection! how she seems to fix her whole hopes upon it!—how to see it shaken agitates her!"

The fiend had his answer ready. It might be pride—the fear of sinking from the queen of a great kingdom, back into the daughter of a petty prince. It might be vanity—which would be painfully wrung to leave splendour, and riches, and admiration of a world, to become—what?—what *had been* the wife of a great king—a lonely, unnoticed outcast from her *once husband's* kingdom. Still, he thought it was impossible. She had never loved splendour—she had never sought admiration. Her delights had been with him alone, in sports and amusements that might be tasted, with any one beloved, even in the lowest station. It was impossible;—and yet it rankled. He felt he wronged her. He was ashamed of it;—and yet those thoughts rankled! Memory, too, dwelt with painful accuracy upon those words he had overheard—*notwithstanding her own feelings, she would not quit him!*—and imagination, with more skill than the best sophist of the court of Crœsus, drew therefrom matter to basis a thousand painful doubts.

As thus he thought, he cast himself again into the seat before the frame; and his mind being well prepared for every bitter and sorrowful idea, he gave himself up to the gloomy train of fancies that pressed on him on every side: the revolt of his barons—the disaffection of his allies—the falling off of his friends—the exhaustion of his finances—and last, not least, that dreadful interdict, that cut his kingdom off from the Christian world, and made it like a lazar house. He resolved all the horrible proofs of the papal power, that he had seen on his way: the young, the old, clinging to his stirrup and praying relief—the dead, the dying, exposed by the road-side to catch his eye—the gloomy silence of the cities and the fields—the death-like void of all accustomed sounds, that spread around his path wherever he turned:—he thought over them all; and, as he thought, he almost unconsciously took up the chalk wherewith Agnes had been tracing the figures on her embroidery, and slowly scrawled upon the edge of the frame, "*Interdict! Interdict!*"

She had watched his motions as a mother watches those of her sick child; but when she read the letters he had written, a faint cry broke from her lips, and she became deadly pale. The conviction that Philip's resolution was shaken by the thunders of the Roman church took full possession of her mind, and she saw that the moment was arrived for her to make her own peace the sacrifice for his. She felt her fate sealed,—she felt her heart broken; and though she had often, often contemplated the chances of such a moment, how trifling, how weak had been the very worst dreams of her imagination to the agony of the reality!

She repressed the cry, however, already half uttered; and rising from her seat with her determination fixed, and her mind made up to the worst evil that fate could inflict, she kneeled down at the King's feet, and, raising her eyes to his, "My lord," she said, "the time is come for making you a request that I am sure you will not refuse. Your own repose, your kingdom's welfare, and the church's peace require—all and each—that you should consent to part from one who has been too long an object of painful contest. Till I thought that the opinion of your prelates and your peers had gained over your will to such a separation, I never dared, my noble lord, even to think thereof; but now you are doubtless convinced that it must be so, and all I have to beg is, that you would give me sufficient guard and escort, to conduct me safely to my father's arms; and that you would sometimes think with tenderness of one who has loved you well."

Agnes spoke as calmly as if she had asked some simple boon. Her voice was low but clear; and the only thing that could betray agitation, was the excessive rapidity of her utterance, seeming as if she doubted her own powers to bring her request to an end.

Philip gazed upon her with a glance of agony and surprise, that was painful even to behold. His cheek was as pale as death; but his brow was flushed and red; and as she proceeded, the drops of agony stood upon his temples. When she had done, he strove to speak, but no voice answered his will; and after gasping as for breath, he started up, exclaimed with great effort, "Oh, Agnes!" and darted out of the chamber.

At ten paces' distance from the door stood Guerin, as if in expectation of the King's return. Philip caught him by the arm, and, scarcely conscious of what he did, pointed wildly with the other hand to the door of the Queen's apartments.

"Good God! my lord," cried the minister, well knowing the violent nature of his master's passion. "In Heaven's name! what have you done?"

"Done! done!" cried the monarch—"Done! She loves me not, Guerin! She seeks to quit me. She loves me not, I say! She loves me not! I, that would have sacrificed my soul for her! I, that would have abjured the cross—embraced the crescent—desolated Europe—died myself, for her. She seeks to leave me! Oh, madness and fury!" and clenching his hands, he stamped with his armed heel upon the ground, till the vaulted rooms of the keep echoed and re-echoed to the sound.

"Oh! my lord! be calm, in Heaven's name!" cried Guerin. "Speak not such wild and daring words! Remember, though you be a king, there is a King still higher; who perhaps even now chastens you for resisting his high will."

"Away!" cried the King. "School not me, sir bishop! I tell thee, there is worse hell *here*, than if there had never been heaven;" and he struck his hand upon his mailed breast with fury, indeed almost approaching to insanity. "Oh, Guerin, Guerin!" he cried again, after a moment's pause, "she would leave me! Did you hear? She would leave me!"

"Let me beseech you, sire," said the minister once more, "compose yourself, and, as a wise and good prince, let the discomfort and misery that Heaven has sent to yourself, at least be turned to your people's good; and, by so doing, be sure that you will merit of Heaven some consolation."

"Consolation!" said the monarch, mournfully. "Oh, my friend, what consolation can I have? She loves me not, Guerin! She seeks to quit me! What consolation can I have under that?"

"At least the consolation, sire, of relieving and restoring happiness to your distressed people," answered the minister. "The Queen herself seeks to quit you, sire. The Queen herself prays you to yield to the authority of the church. After that, you will surely never think of detaining her against her will. It would be an impious rebellion against a special manifestation of Heaven's commands; for sure I am that nothing but the express conviction that it is God's will would have induced the Princess to express such a desire as you have vaguely mentioned."

"Do you think so, Guerin?" demanded Philip, musing—"do you think so? But no, no! She would never quit me if she loved me!"

"Her love for you, my lord, may be suspended by the will of Heaven," replied the minister; "for surely she never showed want of love towards you till now. Yield, then, my lord, to the will of the Most High. Let the Queen depart; and, indeed, by so doing, I believe that even your own fondest hopes may be gratified. Our holy father the pope, you know, would not even hear the question of divorce tried, till you should show your obedience to the church by separating from the Queen. When you have done so, he has pledged himself to examine it in the true apostolic spirit; and doubtless he will come to the same decision as your bishops of France had done before. Free from all ties, you may then recall the Queen——"

"But her love," interrupted Philip,—"can I ever recall her love?"

"If it be by the will of Heaven," replied Guerin, "that she seeks to leave you, her love for you, my lord, will not be lost, but increased a thousand-fold when Heaven's blessing sanctions it: and the pope——"

"Curses upon his head!" thundered Philip, bursting forth into a new frenzy of passion,—"may pride and ambition be a curse on him and his successors for ever! May they grasp at the powers of others, till they lose their own! May nation after nation cast off their sway! and itch of dominion, with impotence of means, be their damnation for ever! Now I have given him back his curse—say, what of him?"

"Nothing, my lord," replied Guerin; "but, that the only means to make him consent to your union with the Princess is to part with her for a time. Oh, my lord! if you have not already consented,—consent, I beseech you: she prays it herself. Do not refuse her—your kingdom requires it: have compassion upon it. Your own honour is implicated; for your barons rebel, and you never can chastise them while the whole realm is bound to their cause by the strong bond of mutual distress."

"Chastise them!" said Philip thoughtfully, pausing on the ideas the minister had suggested. Then suddenly he turned to Guerin with his brow knit, and his cheek flushed, as if with the struggle of some new resolution. "Be it so, Guerin!" cried he,—"be it so! The interdict shall be raised—I will take them one by one—I will cut them into chaff, and scatter them to the wind—I will be King of France indeed! and if, in the meanwhile, this proud prelate yields me my wife—my own beloved wife—why, well; but if he dares then refuse his sanction, when I have bowed my rebellious subjects, his seat is but a frail one; for I will march on Rome, and hurl him from his chair, and send him forth to tread the sands of Palestine.—But stay, Guerin. Think you, that on examination he will confirm the bishops' decree, if I yield for the time?"

"I trust he will, my lord," replied the minister.

"May I tell the Queen you grant her request?" he added, eager to urge Philip's indecision into the irrevocable.

"Yes!" said the monarch, "yes!—yet stay, Guerin—stay!" and he fell into thought again; when suddenly some one, mounting the steps like lightning, approached the little vestibule, where they stood. "Ha! have you taken the Count d'Auvergne?" cried the King, seeing one of his serjeants-of-arms—his eyes flashing at the same time with all their former fury.

"No, my lord," replied the man: "he has not yet been heard of; but a messenger, in breathless haste, from the Bishop of Tours, brings you this packet, sire. He says, Prince Arthur is taken," added the serjeant.

"Avert it, Heaven!" exclaimed Philip, tearing open the despatch. "Too true! too true!" he added: "and the people of Poitou in revolt! laying the misfortune to our door, for resisting the interdict. Oh, Guerin! it must be done—it must be done! The interdict must be raised, or all is lost.—Begone, fellow! leave us!" he exclaimed, turning to the serjeant, who tarried for no second command. Then, pacing up and down for an instant, with his eyes bent on the ground, the King repeated more than once;—"She seeks to leave me! she spoke of it as calmly as a hermit tells his beads. She loves me not!—Too true, she loves me not!"

"May I announce your will in this respect, my lord?" demanded Guerin, as the King paused and pondered bitterly over all that had passed.

"Ask me not, good friend!—ask me not!" replied the King, turning away his head, as if to avoid facing the act to which his minister urged him. "Ask me not. Do what thou wilt; there is my signet,—use it wisely; but tear not my heart, by asking commands I cannot utter."

Thus speaking, the King drew his private seal from his finger, and placing it in Guerin's hand, turned away; and, with a quick but irregular step, descended the staircase, passed through the gardens, and issuing out by the postern gate, plunged into the very heart of the forest.

Guerin paused to collect his thoughts, scarcely believing the victory that had been obtained; so little had he expected it in the morning. He then approached the door of the Queen's apartments, and knocked gently for admittance. At first it passed unnoticed, but on repeating it somewhat louder, one of Agnes' women presented herself, with a face of ashy paleness, while another looked over her shoulder.

"Enter, my lord bishop, enter!" said the second, in a low voice. "Thank God, you are come! We know not what has so struck the Queen; but she is very ill. She speaks not; she raises not her head; and yet by her sobbing 'tis clear she has not fainted. See where she lies!"

Guerin entered. From Philip's account, he had thought to find the Queen with a mind composed and made up to her fortunes; but a sadly different scene presented itself. Agnes had apparently, the moment her husband had left her, caught down the crucifix from a little moveable oratory which stood in the room, and throwing herself on her knees before one of the seats, had been seeking consolation in prayer. The emotions which crossed her address to Heaven may easily be conceived; and so powerfully had they worked, that, overcoming all other thoughts, they seemed to have swept hope and trust, even in the Almighty, away before them, and dashed the unhappy girl to the ground like a stricken flower. Her head and whole person had fallen forward on the cushion of the seat, before which she had been kneeling. Her face was resting partly on her hands, and partly on the cross, which they clasped, and which was deluged with her tears; while a succession of short convulsive sobs was all that announced her to be amongst the living.

"Has she not spoken since the King left her?" demanded Guerin, both alarmed and shocked.

"Not a word, sir," replied her principal attendant. "We heard her move once, after the King's voice ceased; and then came a dead silence: so we ventured to come in, lest she should have fallen into one of those swoons which have afflicted her ever since the tournament of the Champeaux. We have striven to raise her, and to draw some word from her; but she lies there, and sobs, and answers nothing."

"Send for Rigord, the leech," said Guerin; "I saw him in the hall:" and then approaching Agnes, with a heart deeply touched with the sorrow he beheld, "Grieve not so, lady," he said, in a kindly voice; "I trust that this will not be so heavy a burden as you think: I doubt not — indeed I doubt not, that a short separation from your royal husband will be all that you will have to bear. The King having once, by your good counsel, submitted his cause to the trial of the holy church, our good father, the Pope, will doubtless judge mildly, and soon restore to him the treasure he has lost. Bear up, then, sweet lady, bear up! and be sure that wherever you go, the blessings of a whole nation, which your self-devotion has saved from civil war and misery of every kind, will follow your footsteps, and smooth your way."

It was impossible to say whether Agnes heard him or not; but the words of comfort which the good bishop proffered, produced no effect. She remained with her face still leaning on the cross, and a quick succession of convulsive sobs was her only reply. Guerin saw that all farther attempt to communicate with her in any way would be vain for the time; and he only waited the arrival of the leech to leave the apartment.

Rigord, who acted both as physician and historian to Philip Augustus, instantly followed the Queen's attendant, who had been despatched to seek him; and, after having received a promise from him to bring intelligence of the Queen's real state, the minister retired to his own chamber, and hastened to render Philip's resolution irrevocable, by writing that letter of submission to the holy see, which speedily raised the interdict from France.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Black and gloomy silence reigned through the old château of Compiègne, during the two days that followed the Queen's determination to depart. All Philip's military operations were neglected — all the affairs of his immediate government were forgotten, and his hours passed in wandering alone in the forest, or in pacing his chamber with agitated and uncertain steps.

The thoughts and feelings that filled those hours, however, though all painful, were of a mixed and irregular character. Sometimes, it was the indignant swelling of a proud and imperious heart against the usurped power that snatched from it its brightest hopes. Sometimes, it was the thrilling agony of parting from all he loved. Sometimes, it was the burning thirst for vengeance, both on the head of him who had caused the misery, and of those who, by their falling off in time of need, had left him to bear it alone; and, sometimes, it was the shadowy doubts and suspicions of awakened jealousy, throwing all into darkness and gloom. Still, however, the deep, the passionate love remained; and to it clung the faint hope of rewinning the treasure he sacrificed for a time.

Thus, as he strode along the paths of the forest, with his arms crossed upon his broad chest, he sketched out the stern but vast plan of crushing his rebellious barons piecemeal, as soon as ever the interdict — that fatal bond of union amongst them — should be broken. He carried his glance, too, still farther into the future; and saw many a rising coalition against him in Europe, fomented and supported by the church of Rome; and firm in his own vigorous talent, it was with a sort of joy that he contemplated their coming, as the means whereby he would avenge the indignity he had suffered from the Roman see, crush his enemies, punish his disobedient vassals, and, extending his dominion to the infinite of hope, would hold Agnes once more to his heart, and dare the whole world to snatch her thence again.

Such were the thoughts of Philip Augustus, so mingled of many passions — ambition — love — revenge. Each in its turn using as its servant a great and powerful mind, and all bringing about—for with such opposite agents does Heaven still work its high will—all bringing about great changes to the world at large; revolutions in thoughts, in feelings, and in manners; the fall of systems, and the advance of the human mind.

Were we of those who love to view agony with a microscope, we would try equally to display the feelings of Agnes de Meranie, while, with crushed joys, blighted hopes, and a broken heart, she prepared for the journey that was to separate her for ever from him she loved best on earth.

It would be too painful a picture, however, either to draw or to examine. Suffice it, then, that, recovered from the sort of stupor into which she had fallen after the efforts which had been called forth by Philip's presence, she sat in calm dejected silence; while her women, informed of her decision, made the necessary arrangements for her departure. If she spoke at all, it was but to direct care to be taken of each particular object, which might recall to her afterwards the few bright hours she had so deeply enjoyed. 'Twas now an ornament, — 'twas now some piece of her dress, either given her by her husband, or worn on some day of peculiar happiness, which called her notice; and, as a traveller, forced to leave some bright land that he may never see again, carries away with him a thousand views and charts, to aid remembrance in after-years, poor Agnes was anxious to secure, alone, all that could lead memory back to the joys that she was quitting for ever. To each little trinket there was some memory affixed; and to her heart they were relics, as holy as ever lay upon shrine or altar.

It was on the second morning after her resolution had been taken, and with a sad haste, springing from the consciousness of failing powers, she was hurrying on her preparations, when she was informed that the chancellor, Guerin, desired a few minutes' audience. She would fain have shrunk from it; for, though she revered the minister for his undoubted integrity, and his devotion to her husband, yet, it had so happened that Guerin had almost always been called on to speak with her for the purpose of communicating some painful news, or urging some bitter duty. The impression he had left on her mind, therefore, was aught but pleasant; and, though she esteemed him much, she loved not his society. She was of too gentle a nature, however, to permit a feeling so painful to its object to be seen for a moment, even now that the minister's good word or bad could serve her nothing; and she desired him to be admitted immediately.

The havoc that a few hours had worked on a face which was once the perfection of earthly beauty, struck even the minister, unobservant as he was in general of things so foreign to his calling. As he remarked it, he made a sudden pause in his advance; and looking up with a faint smile, more sad, more melancholy than even tears, Agnes shook her head, saying mildly, as a comment on his surprise—

"It cannot be, lord bishop, that any one should suffer as I have suffered, and not let the traces shine out. But you are welcome, my lord. How fares it with my noble lord—my husband, the King? He has not come to me since yester-morning; and yet, methinks, we might have better borne these wretched two days together than apart. We might have fortified each other's resolution with strong words. We might have showed each other, that what it was right to do, it was right to do firmly."

"The King, madam," replied Guerin, "has scarcely been in a state to see any one. I have been thrice refused admittance, though my plea was urgent business of the state. He has been totally alone, till within the last few minutes."

"Poor Philip!" exclaimed Agnes, the tears, in spite of every effort, swelling in her eyes, and rolling over her fair pale cheek. "Poor Philip! And did he think his Agnes would have tried to shake the resolution which cost him such pangs to maintain? Oh, no! She would have aided him to have fixed it, and to bear it."

"He feared not your constancy, lady," replied the Bishop of

Senlis. "He feared his own. I have heard that fortitude is a woman's virtue; and, in truth, I now believe it. But I must do my errand; for, in faith, lady, I cannot see you weep:"—and the good minister wiped a bright drop from his own clear, cold eye. "Having at last seen the King," he proceeded, "he has commanded me to take strict care that all the attendants you please to name should accompany you; that your household expenses should be charged upon his domains, as that of the Queen of France; and having, from all things, good hope that the Pope, satisfied with this submission to his authority, will proceed immediately to verify the divorce pronounced by the bishops, so that your separation may be short——"

"Ha! What?" exclaimed Agnes, starting up, and catching the Bishop's arm with both her hands, while she gazed in his face with a look of thunderstruck, incredulous astonishment—"what is it you say? Is there a chance—is there a hope—is there a possibility that I may see him again—that I may clasp his hand—that I may rest on his bosom once more? O God! O God! blessed be thy holy name!" and falling on her knees, she turned her beautiful eyes to heaven; while, clasping her fair hands, and raising them also, trembling with emotion, towards the sky, her lips moved silently, but rapidly, in grateful, enthusiastic thanksgiving.

"But, oh!" she cried, starting up, and fixing her eager glance upon the minister, "as you are a churchman, as you are a knight, as you are a man! do not deceive me! Is there a hope—is there even a remote hope? Does Philip think there is a hope?"

"It appears to me, lady," replied the minister,—"and for no earthly consideration would I deceive you,—that there is every cause to hope. Our holy father the Pope would not take the matter of the King's divorce even into consideration, till the monarch submitted to the decision of the church of Rome, which, he declared, was alone competent to decide upon the question,—a right which the bishops of France, he said, had arrogated unjustly to themselves."

"And did he," exclaimed Agnes, solemnly—"did he cast his curse upon this whole country—spread misery, desolation, and sorrow over the nation—stir up civil war and rebellion, and tear two hearts asunder that loved each other so devotedly, for the empty right to judge a cause that had been already judged, and do away a sentence which he knew not whether it was right or wrong?—and is this the representative of Christ's apostle?"

"'Tis even as you say, lady, I am afraid," replied the minister. "But even suppose his conduct to proceed from pride and arrogance,—which Heaven forbid that I should insinuate!—our hope would be but strengthened by such an opinion. For, contented with having established his right and enforced his will, he will of course commission a council to inquire into the cause, and decide according to their good judgment. What that decision will be, is only known on high; but as many prelates of France will of course sit in that council, it is not likely that they will consent to reverse their own judgment."

"And what thinks the King?" demanded Agnes, thoughtfully

"No stronger proof, lady, can be given, that he thinks as I do," replied Guerin, "than his determination that you should never be far from him; so that, as soon as the papal decision shall be announced in his favour, he may fly to reunite himself to her he will ever look upon as his lawful wife. He begs, madam, that you would name that royal château which you would desire for your residence——"

"Then I am not to quit France!" cried Agnes, hope and joy once more beaming up in her eyes. "I am not to put wide, foreign lands between us, and the journey of many a weary day! Oh! 'tis too much! 'tis too much!" and sinking back into the chair where she had been sitting before the minister's entrance, she covered her eyes with her hands, and let the struggle between joy and sorrow flow gently away in tears.

Guerin made a movement as if to withdraw; but the Queen raised her hand, and stopped him. "Stay, my lord bishop, stay!" she said.—"These are tears such as I have not shed for long; and there is in them a balmy quality that will soothe many of the wounds in my heart. Before you go, I must render some reply to my dear lord's message. Tell him, as my whole joy in life has been to be with him, so my only earthly hope is to rejoin him soon. Thank him for all the blessed comfort he has sent me by your lips; and say to him that it has snatched his Agnes from the brink of despair. Say, moreover, that I would fain, fain see him, if it will not pain him too deeply, before I take my departure from the halls where I have known so much happiness. But bid him not, on that account, to give his heart one pang to solace mine. And now, my lord, I will choose my residence. Let me see. I will not say Compiègne! for, though I love it well, and have here many a dear memory, yet, I know, Philip loves it too; and I would that he should often inhabit some place that is full of remembrances of me. But there is a castle on the woody hill above Mantes where once, in the earliest days of our marriage, we spent a pleasant month. It shall be my widow's portion, till I see my lord again. Oh! why, why, why must we part at all? But no!" she added, more firmly, "it is doubtless right that it should be so: and, if we may thus buy for our fate the blessed certainty of never parting again, I will not think—I will try not to think—the price too dear."

"Perhaps, madam, if I might venture to advise," said the minister, "the interview you desire with the King would take place the last thing before your departure."

Agnes drooped her head. "My departure!" said she, mournfully. "True! 'twill be but one pain for all. I have ordered my departure for this evening, because I thought that the sooner I were gone, the sooner would the pain be over for Philip; but oh, lord bishop, you know not what it is to take such a resolution of departure—to cut short, even by one brief minute, that fond lingering with which we cling to all the loved objects that have surrounded us in happiness. But it is right to do it, and it shall be done: my litter shall be here an hour before supper; what guards you and the King think necessary to escort me, I will beg you to command at the hour of three. But I hope," she added, in an almost imploring tone,—"I hope I shall see my husband before I go?"

"Doubt it not, madam," said Guerin: "I have but to express your desire. Could I but serve you farther!"

"In nothing, my good lord," replied the Queen, "but in watching over the King like a father. Soothe his ruffled mood; calm his hurt mind; teach him not to forget Agnes, but to bear her absence with more fortitude than she can bear his. And now, my lord," she added, wiping the tears once more from her eyes, "I will go and pray, against that dreadful hour. I have need of help, but Heaven will give it me; and if ever woman's heart broke in silence, it shall be mine this night."

Guerin took his leave and withdrew; and, proceeding to the cabinet of Philip Augustus, gave him such an account of his conversation with the Queen, as he thought might soothe and console him, without shaking his resolution of parting from her, at least for a time. Philip listened, at first, in gloomy silence; but, as every now and then, through the dry account given by his plain minister, shone out some touch of the deep affection borne him by his wife, a shade passed away from his brow, and he would exclaim, "Ha! said she so? Angel! Oh, Guerin, she is an angel!" Then starting up, struck by some sudden impulse, he paced the room with hasty and irregular steps.

"A villain!" cried he, at length—"a villain!—Thibalt d'Auvergne, beware thy head!—By the blessed rood! Guerin, if I lay my hands upon him, I will cut his false heart from his mischief-devising breast! Fiend! fiend! to strive to rob me of an angel's love like that! He has fled me, Guerin!—he has fled me for the time. You have doubtless heard, within five minutes, he and his train had left the town behind him. 'Twas the consciousness of villany drove him to flight. But I will find him, if I seek him in the heart of Africa! The world shall not hold us two."

Guerin strove to calm the mind of the King, but it was in vain; and, till the hour approached for the departure of Agnes from the castle, Philip spent the time either in breathing vows of vengeance against his adversaries, or in pacing up and down, and thinking, with a wrung and agonized heart, over the dreadful moment before him. At length he could bear it no longer; and, throwing open the door of his cabinet, he walked hastily towards the Queen's apartments. Guerin followed, for a few paces, knowing that the critical moment was arrived when France was to be saved or lost—doubting the resolution of both Agnes and Philip, and himself uncertain how to act.

But before Philip had passed through the corridor, he turned to the minister, and, holding up his hand, with an air of stern majesty, he said, "Alone, Guerin! I must be alone! At three, warn me!" and he pursued his way to the Queen's apartment.

The next hour we must pass over in silence; for no one was witness to a scene that required almost more than mortal fortitude to support. At three, the Queen's litter was in the castle-court, the serjeants-of-arms mounted to attend her, and the horses of her ladies held ready to set out. With a heart beating with stronger emotions than had ever agitated it in the face of adverse hosts, Guerin approached the apartments of Agnes de Meranie. He opened the door, but paused without pushing aside the tapestry, saying, "My lord!"

"Come in," replied Philip, in a voice of thunder; and Guerin, entering, beheld him standing in the midst of the floor with Agnes clinging to him, fair, frail, and faint, with her arms twined round his powerful frame, like the ivy clinging round some tall oak agitated by a storm. The King's face was heated, his eyes were red, and the veins of his temples were swelled almost to bursting. "She shall not go!" cried he, as Guerin entered, in a voice both raised and shaken by the extremity of his feelings—"by the Lord of heaven! she shall not go!"

There was energy in his tone, almost to madness; and Guerin stood silent, seeing all that he had laboured to bring about swept away in that moment. But Agnes slowly withdrew her arms from the King, raised her weeping face from his bosom, clasped her hands together, and gazed on him for a moment with a glance of deep and agonized feeling—then said, in a low but resolute voice, "Philip, it must be done! Farewell, beloved! farewell!" and, running forward towards the door, she took the arm of one of her women to support her from the chamber.

Before she could go, however, Philip caught her again in his arms, and pressed kiss after kiss upon her lips and cheek. "Help me! help me!" said Agnes, and two of her women, gently disengaging her from the King's embrace, half bore, half carried her down the stairs, and, raising her into the litter, drew its curtains round, and veiled her farther sorrows from all other eyes.

When she was gone, Philip stood for a moment gazing, as it were, on vacancy—twice raised his hand to his head—made a step or two towards the door — reeled — staggered — and fell heavily on the floor, with the blood gushing from his mouth and nostrils.

CHAPTER XXX.

The Count d'Auvergne had left Agnes de Meranie, with his mind stretched to the highest point of excitement. For months and months he had been dwelling on the thoughts of that one moment. In the midst of other scenes and circumstances, his soul had been abstracted and busy with the anticipations of that hour. His whole powers and energies had been wrought up to bear it firmly and calmly. And now he had accomplished his task. It was done! he had seen, he had met the object of his young, deep, all-absorbing affection—the object of all his regrets, the undesigning cause of all his misery—he had seen her the wife of another—he had seen her in sorrow and distress—he had helped even to tear her heart, by pressing on her a separation from the man she loved. He had marked every touch of her strong affection for Philip. He had felt every cold and chilling word she had addressed to himself, and yet he had borne it calmly—firmly, at least. Like the Indian savage, he had endured the fire and the torture without a sign of suffering: but still the fire and the torture had done their work upon his corporeal frame.

The words in the letter, presented to him by De Coucy's page, swam dizzily before his eyes, without conveying their defined meaning to his senses. He saw that it was some new pang—he saw that it was some fresh misfortune; but reason reeled upon her throne, and he could not sufficiently fix his mind to gather what was the precise nature of the tidings he received. He bade the page follow, however, in a hurried and confused tone, and passed rapidly on through the castle hall into the town, and to the lodging where he had left his retainers. His horse stood saddled in the court, and all seemed prepared for departure; and without well knowing why, but with the mere indistinct desire of flying from the sorrows that pursued him, he mounted his horse and turned him to the road.

"Shall we follow, my lord?" demanded his squire, running at his bridle as he rode forward.

"Ha?—Yes!—Follow!" replied the Count, and galloped on with the letter the page had given him still in his hand. He rode on with the swiftness of the wind; whenever his horse made the least pause, urging him forward with the spur, as if a moment's cessation of his rapid pace gave him up again to the dark and gloomy thoughts that pursued him like fierce and winged fiends.

Still, his long habit of commanding his feelings struggled for its ancient power. He felt that his mind was overcome, and he strove to raise it up again. He endeavoured to recall his stoical firmness; he tried to reason upon his own weakness; but the object to which he had bent all his thoughts was accomplished—the motive for his endurance was over, his firmness was gone, and reason hovered vaguely round each subject that was presented to her, without grasping it decidedly. During the last two years, he had raised up, as it were, a strong embankment in his own mind against the flood of his sorrows, he had fortified it with every power of a firm and vigorous intellect; but the torrent had swelled by degrees, till its force became resistless; and now it bore away every barrier, with destruction the more fearful from the opposition it had encountered.

He rode on. The day was burning and oppressive. The hot mid-day sun struck scorching on his brow, and his eyes became wild and bloodshot; but still he rode on, as if he felt in no degree anything that passed without the dark chamber of his own bosom. De Coucy's page had hastened for his horse when he found the Count about to depart, and had galloped after. Seeing at length that his thoughts were occupied in other matters, and that he held the letter he had received, crushed together in his hand, Ermold De Marcy made bold to spur forward his weary beast, and approaching D'Auvergne to say, "Is there any hope, my lord, of your being able, in this matter, to relieve Sir Guy?"

"Sir Guy!" cried D'Auvergne, suddenly checking his horse in full career, and gazing in the page's face with an anxious, thoughtful look, as if he strove with effort to recollect his ideas, and fix them on the subject brought before him—"Sir Guy! What of Sir Guy? Who is Sir Guy?"

"Do you not remember me, beau sire?" asked the page, astonished at the wild, unsettled look of a man whose fixed, stern, immoveable coldness of expression had often been a matter of wonder to the light, volatile youth, whose own thoughts and feelings changed full fifty times a day—"do you not know me, beau sire?" he asked. "I am Ermold de Marcy, the page of Sir Guy de Coucy, who now lies in English bonds, as that letter informs you."

"De Coucy in bonds!" cried the Count, starting. Then, after gazing for a moment or two in the page's face, he added, slowly, "Ay!—Yes!—True! Some one told me of it before, methinks. In bonds! I will march and deliver him!"

"Alas! my lord!" answered the page, "all the powers in France would not deliver him by force. He is in the hands of the English army, full fifty thousand strong; and it is only by paying his ransom, I may hope to see my noble lord freed."

"You shall pay his ransom," replied D'Auvergne—"yes, you shall pay his ransom. How much does the soldan ask?"

"'Tis the English King who holds him, my lord," answered the page; "not the soldan. We are in France, beau sire, not in Palestine."

"Not in Palestine, fool!" cried the Count, frowning as if the page sought to mock him. "Feel I not the hot sun burning on my brow? And yet," he continued, looking round, "I believe thou art right.—But the ransom, what does the soldan require?—De Coucy!—the noble De Coucy!—to think of his ever being a prisoner to those infidel Saracens! What does the miscreant soldan demand?"

Surprised and shocked at what he beheld, the page paused for a moment till D'Auvergne repeated his question. Then, however, seeing that it would be a vain attempt to change the current of the Count's thoughts, he replied, "I do not know, my lord, precisely; but I should suppose they would never free a knight of his renown under a ransom of ten thousand crowns."

"Ten thousand crowns!" cried D'Auvergne, his mind getting more and more astray every moment, under the effort and excitement of conversation, "thou shalt have double! Then with the remainder thou shalt buy thee a flock of sheep, and find out some valley in the mountains, where nor man nor woman ever trod; there shalt thou hide thee with thy sheep, till age whitens thee, and death strikes thee. Thou shalt! thou shalt, I tell thee, that the records of the world may say there was once a man who lived and died in peace. But come to Jerusalem! Come! and thou shalt have the gold. For me, I am bound by a holy vow to do penance in solitude amongst the green woods of

Mount Libanus. Follow quick! follow! and thou shalt have the gold."

So saying, the Count rode on, and Ermold de Marcy followed with his train; speaking earnestly, though not very sagely, perhaps, with D'Auvergne's chief squire, concerning the sudden fit of insanity that had seized his lord.

Notwithstanding the strange turn which the mind of Count Thibalt had taken, he mistook not his road to Paris, nor did he once err in the various turnings of the city. On the contrary, with a faculty sometimes possessed by madness, he seemed to proceed with more readiness than usual, following all the shortest and most direct streets towards the house of the canons of St. Berthe's; where, on his arrival, he went straight to the apartments which had been assigned to him by the good fathers; and calling for his treasurer, whom he had left behind on his visit to Compiègne, he demanded the key of his treasure.

The case which contained the sums he had destined to defray the expenses of his return to the Holy Land was soon laid open before him. For a moment or two, he gazed from it to the page, with one of the painful, wandering looks of a mind partially gone, striving vainly to collect all its remaining energies, and concentrate them on some matter of deep and vital import.

"Take it!" cried he, at length—"take what is necessary. Tell thy lord," he added, with great effort, as if the linking each idea to the other was a work of bitter labour—"tell thy lord I would come—I would strive to free him myself—I would do much.—But—but Auvergne is not what he was. My heart is the same—but my brain, youth! my brain!"—and he carried his hand to his brow, wandering over it with his fingers, while his eyes fixed gradually on vacancy; and he continued muttering broken sentences to himself, such as, "This morning!—ay! this morning.—The hot sun of the desert.—And Agnes—yes, Agnes—her cold words." Then suddenly catching the eye of the page fixed upon his countenance, he pointed to the gold, exclaiming angrily, "Take it! Why dost thou not take it?—Get thee gone with it to thy lord. Dost thou stay to mock? Take the gold, and get thee gone, I say!"

The page, without furthur bidding, kneeled beside the case, and took thence as many bags of gold as he thought necessary for the purpose of ransoming De Coucy; placing them one by one in his pouch. When he had done, he paused a moment for licence to depart, which was soon given in an angry "Get thee gone!" and, descending the stairs as quickly as possible, he only stayed with the servants of the Count d'Auvergne, to bid them have a care of their lord; for that, to a certainty, he was as mad as a marabout; after which he mounted his horse and rode away.

Ermold de Marcy first turned the head of his weary beast towards the east; but no sooner was he out of Paris, than he changed that direction for one nearly west; and, without exactly retreading his steps, he took quite an opposite path to that which he first intended. This retrograde movement proceeded from no concerted purpose, but was, in reality and truth, a complete change of intention; for, to say sooth, the poor page was not a little embarrassed with the business he had in hand.

"Here," thought he, "I have about me twelve thousand crowns in gold. The roads are full of cotereaux, routiers, and robbers of all descriptions; my horse is so weary, that if I am attacked, I must e'en stand still and be plundered. Night is coming on fast; and I have nowhere to lie—and what to do I know not. If I carry all this gold about with me too, till I find my master, I shall lose it, by St. Jude! By the holy rood! I will go to the old hermit of Vincennes. He cheated me, and proved himself a true man, after all, about that ring. So I will leave the gold under his charge till I have learned more of my lord, and to whom he has surrendered himself."

This resolution was formed just as he got out of the gate of the city; and skirting round on the outside, he took his way towards the tower of Vincennes; after passing which he soon reached the dwelling of the hermit in the forest of Saint Mandé, with but little difficulty in finding his road. The old man received him with somewhat more urbanity than usual, and heard his tale in calm silence. Ermold related circumstantially all that had occurred to him since he followed his lord from Paris, looking upon the hermit in the light of a confessor, and relieving his bosom of the load that had weighed upon it ever since his truant escapade to the good town of La Flêche. He told, too, all the efforts he had made to avert the unhappy effects of Jodelle's treachery; and portrayed, with an air of bitter mortification, that interested the old man in his favour, the degree of despair he had felt when, on mounting the hill above Mirebeau, he saw the English army in possession of the city and country round about.

"And saw you no one who had escaped?" demanded the anchorite, with some earnestness.

"No one," replied the page, "but our own mad juggler, Gallon the fool, who had got away, though sore wounded with an arrow. From him, however, I learned nothing, for he was so cursed with the pain of his wound, that he would speak no sense; and when I questioned him sharply, he shouted like a devil, as is his wont, and ran off as hard as he could. I then rode forward to Tours," continued the page, "and for a crown, got a holy clerk to write me a letter to the Count d'Auvergne, in case I could not have speech of him, telling him of my lord's case, and praying his help; and never did I doubt that the noble Count would instantly go down to Tours himself, to ransom his brother in arms; but, God help us all! I found his wit a cup-full weaker than when I left him."

"How so?" demanded the hermit: "what wouldst thou say, boy? Why did not the good Count go? Speak more plainly."

"Alas! good father, he is as mad as the moon," replied the page; "something that happened this morning at Compiègne, his followers say, must have been the cause, for yesterday he was as wise and calm as ever. To-day, too, when he rose, he was gloomy and stern, they tell me, as he always is; but when he came back from the château, he was as mad as a Saracen santon."

The hermit clasped his hands, and knit his brows; and after thinking deeply for several minutes, he said, apparently more as a corollary to his own thoughts, than to the page's words, "Thus we should learn, never for any object, though it may seem good, to quit the broad and open path of truth. That word policy has caused, and will cause, more misery in the world, than all the plagues of Egypt. I abjure it, and henceforth will never yield a word's approval to aught that has even a touch of falsehood, be it but in seeming. Never deceive any one, youth! even to their own good, as thou mayest think; for thou knowest not what little circumstance may intervene, unknown to thee, and, scattering all the good designs of the matter to the wind, may leave the deceit alone, to act deep and mischievously. A grain of sand in the tubes of a clepsydra will derange all its functions, and throw its manifold and complicated movements wrong. How much more likely, then, that some little unforeseen accident in the intricate workings of this great earthly machine should prove our best calculations false, and whip us with our own policy! Oh! never, never deceive! Deceit in itself is evil, and intention can never make it good."

Though, like most people, who, when they discover an error in their own conduct, take care to sermonize some other person thereupon, the hermit addressed his discourse to Ermold de Marcy, his homily was in fact a reproach to himself; for, in the page's account of the Count d'Auvergne's madness, he read, though mistakenly, the effects of the scheme he had sanctioned, as we have seen, for freeing the country from the interdict. For a moment or two, he still continued to think over what he had heard, inflicting on himself that sort of bitter castigation, which his stern mind was as much accustomed to address to himself as to others. He then turned again to the subject of De Coucy. "'Tis an unhappy accident thou hast told me there, youth," he said, coming suddenly back upon the subject, without any immediate connexion;—"'tis an unhappy accident,—both your lord being taken, and his brother in arms being unable to aid him; but we must see for means to gain his ransom, and, God willing! it shall be done."

"'Tis done already, father hermit," replied the page: "the noble Count had not lost his love for Sir Guy, though he had lost his own senses; and albeit he was in no state to manage the matter of the ransom himself, he gave me sufficient money. It lies there in that pouch, twelve thousand crowns, all in gold. Now, I dare not be riding about with such a sum; and so I have brought it to you to keep safe, while I go back and find out the Earl of Salisbury, who, I have heard say, was an old companion of my master's in the Holy Land, and will tell me, for his love, into whose hands he has fallen. I will now lead my beast back to the village, by Vincennes, for carry me he can no farther; and, though I could stretch me here in your hut for the night, no stable is near, and my poor bay would be eaten by the wolves before day-break. To-morrow, with the first ray of the morning, I set out to seek my lord, and find means of freeing him. 'Tis a long journey, and may be a long treaty. Give me, therefore, two months to accomplish it all; and if I come not then, think that the routiers have devoured me; and send, I pray thee, good father, to King Philip, and bid him see my lord ransomed."

"Stay, boy," said the hermit: "you must not go alone. To-morrow morning speed to Paris; seek Sir François de Roussy, Mountjoy king-at-arms; tell him I sent thee. Show him thy lord's case, and bid him give thee a herald to accompany thee on thine errand. Thus shalt thou do it far quicker, and far more surely; and the herald's guerdon shall not be wanting when he returns."

The page eagerly caught at the idea, and the farther arrangements between himself and the hermit were easily made. After having yielded a few of its gold pieces, to defray the expenses of the page's journey, the pouch, with the money it contained, was safely deposited under the moss and straw of the hermit's bed; which place, as we have seen, had already, on one occasion, served a similar purpose. Ermold de Marcy then received the old man's blessing, and bidding him adieu, left him to contemplate more at leisure the news he had so suddenly brought him.

It was then, when freed from the immediate subject of De Coucy's imprisonment, which the presence of the page had of course rendered the first subject of consideration, that the mind of the hermit turned to the unhappy fate of Arthur Plantagenet. He paused for several moments, with his arms folded on his chest, drawing manifold sad deductions from that unhappy Prince's claim to the crown of England, joined with his present situation, and his uncle's established cruelty. There were hopes that the English barons might interfere, or that shame and fear might lead John to hold his unscrupulous hand. But yet the chance was a frail one; and as the old man contemplated the reverse, he gave an involuntary shudder, and sinking on his knees before the crucifix, he addressed a silent prayer to Heaven, for protection to the unfortunate beings exposed to the cruel ambition of the weak and remorseless tyrant.

CHAPTER XXXI.

There stood, in ancient days, on the banks of the river Seine, a tall, strong tower, forming one of the extreme defences of the city of Rouen towards the water. It has long, long been pulled down; but I have myself seen a picture of that capital of Normandy, taken while the tower I speak of yet stood; and though the painter had indeed represented it as crumbling and dilapidated, even in his day, there was still an air of menacing gloom in its aspect, that seemed to speak it a place whose dungeons might have chronicled many a misery—a place of long sorrows, and of ruthless deeds.

In this tower, some four months after the events which we have recorded, were confined two persons of whom we have already spoken much—Arthur Plantagenet and Guy de Coucy.

The chamber that they inhabited was not one calculated either to raise the spirits of a prisoner by its lightsome airiness, or to awaken his regrets by the prospect of the free world without. It seemed as if made for the purpose of striking gloom and terror into the bosoms of its sad inhabitants; and strong must have been the heart that could long bear up under the depressing influence of its heavy atmosphere.

Its best recommendation was its spaciousness, being a square of near thirty feet in length and breadth; but this advantage was almost completely done away by the depression of the roof, the highest extent of which, at the apex of the arches whereof it was composed, was not above eight feet from the floor. In the centre rose a short column of about two feet in diameter, from which, at the height of little more than a yard from the ground, began to spring the segments of masonry forming the low but pointed arches of the vault.

Window there was none; but at the highest part, through the solid bend of one of the arches, was pierced a narrow slit, or loop-hole, admitting sufficient light into the chamber to render the objects dimly visible, but nothing more.

The furniture which this abode of wretchedness contained was as scanty as could well be, though a pretence of superior comfort had been given to it over the other dungeons, when it was about to be tenanted by a Prince. Thus, in one part was a pile of straw, on which De Coucy made his couch; and in another corner was a somewhat better bed, with two coverings of tapestry, placed there for the use of Arthur. There were also two settles—an unknown luxury in prisons of that day; and by the massy column in the centre stood a small oaken table.

At the side of this last piece of furniture, with his arms stretched thereon, and his face buried in his arms, sat Arthur Plantagenet. It was apparently one of those fine sunny days that sometimes break into February; and a bright ray of light found its way through the narrow loophole we have mentioned, and fell upon the stooping form of the unhappy boy, exposing the worn and soiled condition of his once splendid apparel, and the confused, dishevelled state of the rich, curling, yellow hair, which fell in glossy disarray over his fair cheeks, as his brow rested heavily upon his arms. The ray passed on, and forming a long narrow line of light upon the pillar, displayed a rusty ring of iron, with its stauncheon deeply imbedded in the stone. Attached to this hung several links of a broken chain; but though the unhappy Prince, when he looked upon the manacles that had been inflicted on some former tenant of the prison, might have found that comparative consolation which we derive from the knowledge of greater misery than our own, yet the other painful associations, called up by the sight, more than counterbalanced any soothing comparisons it suggested; and he seemed, in despair, to be hiding his eyes from all and everything, in a scene where each object he looked upon called up, fresh, some regret for the past, or some dread for the future.

A little beyond, in a leaning position, with his hand grasping one of the groins of the arch, stood De Coucy, in the dim half light that filled every part of the chamber, where that ray already mentioned fell not immediately; and with a look of deep mournful interest, he contemplated his young fellow-captive, whose fate seemed to affect him even more than his own.

During the first few days of their captivity, all the prisoners taken at Mirebeau had been treated by the crafty John with kindness, and even distinction; more especially Arthur and De Coucy, at least while William Longsword, the Earl of Pembroke, and some others of the more independent of the English nobility, remained near the person of the King. While this lasted, the youthful mind of Arthur Plantagenet recovered in some degree its tone, though the fatal events of Mirebeau had at first sunk it almost to despair.

On one pretence or another, however, John soon contrived that all those who might have obstructed his schemes, either by opposition or remonstrance, should be despatched on distant and tedious expeditions; and, free from the restraint of their presence, his real feelings towards Arthur, and those who supported him, were not long in displaying themselves.

Though ungifted with that fine quality which, teaching us to judge and direct our own conduct as well as to understand and govern that of others, truly deserves the name of *wisdom*, John possessed that knowledge of human nature, — that cunning science in man's weaknesses, which is too often mistaken for wisdom. He well understood, therefore, that the good and noble—even in an age when virtue was chivalrous, and when the protection of the oppressed was a deed of fame—would often suffer violence and cruelty to pass unnoticed, after time had taken the first hard aspect from the deed. He knew that what would raise a thousand voices against it to-day, would to-morrow be canvassed in a whisper, and the following day forgotten: and he judged that, though the first rumour of his severity towards his nephew might for a moment wake the indignation of his barons, yet, long before they were re-united on the scene of action, individual interests, and newer events, would step in, and divert their thoughts to very different channels.

Lord Pembroke was consequently despatched to Guyenne, with several of those unmanageable honest men, whose straightforward honour is the stumbling-block of evil intentions. Lord Salisbury was left once more to protect Touraine with very inefficient forces; and John himself retreated across the Loire, with the prisoners and the bulk of his army.

Each day's march changed his demeanour towards Arthur and his unfortunate companions. His kingly courtesy became gradually scanty kindness, manifest neglect, and, at last, cruel ill usage. The revolted nobles of Poitou had given quite sufficient excuse for the King's severity, towards them, at least; and with little ceremony, either of time or manner, they were consigned to separate prisons, scattered over the face of Maine and Brittany. Arthur and De Coucy were granted a few days more of comparative liberty, following the English army; strongly escorted indeed, but still breathing the free air, and enjoying the sight of fair nature's face. At length, as the army passed through Normandy, their escort, already furnished with instructions to that effect, turned from the line of march, and deposited them within the walls of the castle of Falaise; from which place they were removed to Rouen in the midst of the winter, and confined in the chamber we have already described.

Arthur's mind had borne up at Falaise; so far, at least, that, though he grieved over the breaking of his first splendid hopes, and felt, with all the eager restlessness of youth, the uncomforts of imprisonment, the privation of exercise, the dull, monotonous round of daily hours, the want of novelty, and the wearisome continuity of one unchanging train of thought; yet hope was still alive—nay, even expectation; and ceaselessly would he build those blessed castles in the air, that, like the portrait of an absent friend, picture forth the sweet features of distant happiness, far away, but not lost for ever. The air of the prison had there been fresh and light, the governor mild and urbane; and though, there, he had been lodged in a different chamber from De Coucy, yet his spirits had not sunk, even under solitude.

At Rouen, however, though the jailer, for his own convenience, rather than their comfort, placed the two prisoners in the same apartment, Arthur's cheerfulness quickly abandoned him; his health failed, and his hopes and expectations passed away like dreams, as they were. The air, though cold, was close and heavy; and the dim grey light of the chamber seemed to encourage every melancholy thought.

When De Coucy strove to console him, he would but shake his head with an impatient start, as if the very idea of better days was but a mockery of his hopelessness; and at other times he would sit, with the silent tears of anguish and despair chasing each other down his fair, pale cheeks, hour after hour; as if weeping had become his occupation. As one day followed another, his depression seemed to increase. The only sign of interest he had shown in what was passing in the busy world without, had been the questions which he asked the jailer, morning and evening, when their food or a light was brought them. Then, he had been accustomed anxiously to demand when his uncle John was expected to return from England, and sometimes to comment on the reply; but, after a while, this too ceased, and his whole energies seemed benumbed with despair, from the rising till the setting of the sun.

After it was down, however, he seemed in a degree to reawaken; and then alone he showed an interest in anything unconnected with his own immediate fate, when the day had gone, and by the light of the lamp that was given them at night, De Coucy would relate to him many a battle and adventure in the Holy Land—scenes of danger, and terror, and excitement; and deeds of valour, and strength, and generosity, all lighted up with the romantic and chivalrous spirit of the age, and tinged with that wild and visionary superstition which cast a vague sort of shadowy grandeur over all the tales of those days.

Then Arthur's cheek would glow with a flush of feverish interest; and he would ask many an eager question, and listen to long and minute descriptions, that would weary beyond all patience any modern ears; and, in the end, he would wish that, instead of having embarked his hopes in the fatal endeavour of recovering lost kingdoms, and wresting his heritage from the usurper, he had given his life and hopes to the recovery of Christ's blessed cross and sepulchre.

This, however, was only, as we have said, after the sun had gone down, and when the lamp was lighted; for it seemed that then, when the same darkness was apportioned to every one, and when every one sought a refuge within the walls of their dwellings, that he felt not his imprisonment so painfully as when day had risen—*day*, which to him was without any of day's enjoyments. *He* could not taste the fresh air—*he* could not catch the sunshine of the early spring—*he* could not stretch his enfeebled limbs in the sports of the morning—*he* could not gaze upon all the unrivalled workmanship of God's glorious, beauty-spreading hand. Daylight to him was all privation; and even the sunbeam that found its way through the loophole in the masonry, seemed but given to wring him with the memory of sweets he could not taste. He thus, therefore, turned his back towards it, as we have at first depicted him; and burying his eyes upon his arms, gave himself up to the recollection of broken hopes, long-gone visions of empiry and dominion, stifled aspirations after honour and fame, brilliant past schemes of justice and equity, and universal benevolence, and all those bright materials given to youth, out of which manhood preserves so few to carry on into old age. Powerful feelings and generous designs are, alas! too like the inheritance of a miser in the hands of some spendthrift heir—lavished away on trifles in our early years, and needed, but not possessed, in our riper age.

None had been more endowed in such sort than Arthur Plantagenet; but it seemed the will of Fortune, to snatch from him, piece by piece, each portion of his heritage, and to crush the energies of his mind at the same time that she tore from him his right of dominion; and thus, while he lay and pondered over all he had once hoped, there was a touch of bitterness mingled with his grief, to feel that the noblest wishes are but the mock and sport of Fate. Born to a kingdom, yet doomed to a prison; as a child he had entered on the career of a man; he had mingled the bright aspirations of youth with the ambitious yearnings of maturity; and now his infancy lay crushed under the misfortunes of manhood.

De Coucy gazed on him with feelings of deep and painful interest. What he might have been, and what he was; his youth, and his calamities; his crushed mind, and its former gallant energy, stood forth in strong contrast to the eyes of De Coucy, as, leaning against the arch, he contemplated the unhappy Prince, whose thin, pale hands, appearing from beneath the curls of his glossy hair, spoke plainly the ravages that confinement and sorrow had worked upon him.

The knight was about to speak, when the sounds of voices approaching were heard through the low small door that opened from their chamber upon a stone gallery at the head of the staircase. De Coucy listened.

"Thou art bold! — thou art too bold!" cried one of the speakers, pausing opposite the door. "Tell not me of other prisoners! Thine orders were strict, that he should be kept alone. — What was't to thee, if that mad De Coucy had rotted with fifty others in a cell? Thy charge is taken from thee. Speak not! but begone! Leave me thy keys.—Thou, Humbert, stand by with thy men. Listen not; but if I call, rush in. Mark me, dost thou? If I speak loud, rush in!"

The bolts were withdrawn, the key turned, and, the door opening, John, King of England, entered, stooping his head to pass the low arch of the doorway. Arthur had looked up at the first sound, and his pale cheek had become a hue paler, even before the appearance of his uncle; but, when John did at length approach, a quick sharp shudder passed over his nephew's form, as if there had been indeed some innate antipathy, which warned the victim that he was in presence of him destined to be his murderer.

The King advanced a step or two into the chamber, and then paused, regarding Arthur, who had risen from his seat, with a cold and calculating eye. A slight smile of gratification passed over his lip, as he remarked the sallow and emaciated state to which imprisonment and despair had reduced a form but three short months before full of life, and strength, and beauty.

The smile passed away instantly from a face little accustomed to express the real feelings of the heart; but John still continued for a moment to contemplate his nephew, evidently little pained at the sight of the change he beheld, whether from that change he augured sufficient depression of mind to second his purpose of wringing from his nephew the cession of his claims, or whether he hoped that sickness might prove as good an auxiliary as murder, and spare him bloodshed, that would inevitably be accompanied by danger, as well as reproach. His eye then glanced through the sombre arches of the vault, till it rested on De Coucy with a sort of measuring fixedness, as if he sought to ascertain the exact space between himself and the knight.

Satisfied on this point, he turned again to Arthur.

"Well, fair nephew," said he, with that kind of irony which he seldom banished from his lips, "for three years I asked you in vain to honour my poor court with your noble presence. You have come at last, and doubtless the reception I have given you is such, that you will never think of departing from a place where you may be hospitably entertained for life. How love you prison walls, fair nephew?"

Arthur replied not; but, casting himself again upon the settle, covered his eyes as before, and seemed, from the quick rise and fall of his shoulders, to weep bitterly.

"Sir King," said De Coucy, interposing indignantly, "thou art, then, even more cruel than report gives thee out. Must thou needs add the torture of thy words to the tyranny of thine actions? In the name of God! bad man, leave this place of wretchedness, and give thy nephew, at least, such tranquillity as a prison may afford."

"Ha! beau sire De Coucy," cried John, with an unaltered tone. "Methinks thou art that gallant knight who proclaimed Arthur Plantagenet King of England in the heart of Mirebeau. His kingdom is a goodly one," he continued, looking round the chamber, "gay and extensive is it! He has to thank thee much for it!—Let me tell thee, sir knight," he added, raising his voice and knitting his brow, "to the bad counsels of thee, and such as thee, Arthur Plantagenet owes all his sorrows and captivity. Ye have poisoned his ear against his kindred; ye have raised up in him ambitious thoughts that become him not; ye have taught him to think himself a king; and ye have cast him down from a prince to a prisoner.

John spoke loudly and angrily, and at the sound the door of the vault was pushed open, showing the form of a man-at-arms about to enter, followed by several others. But the King waved them back with his hand, and turning to Arthur, he proceeded:—"Hearken to me, nephew! The way to free yourself, and to return to the bright world from which you are now cut off, is free and open before you."*

Arthur raised his head.

"Renounce your claim to kingdoms you shall never possess, and cast from you expectations you can never realize, and you shall be free to-morrow. I will restore to you your duchy of Brittany; I will give you a portion befitting a Plantagenet; and I will treat you kindly as my brother's son. What would you more? You shall have the friendship and protection of the King of England."

"I would rather have the enmity of the King of France," cried Arthur, starting up, as the long catalogue of all John's base perfidies rushed across his mind, coupled with the offer of his friendship—"I would rather have the enmity of the King of France! There is always some resource in the generosity of a true knight."

"Thou art a fool, stubborn boy!" cried John, his eye flashing and his lip curling at his nephew's bold reply—"thou art a stubborn fool! Are not the Kings of France the hereditary enemies of our race?"

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* This conversation is reported by the chroniclers of the time to have taken place previous to Arthur's confinement in the tower of Rouen.

"Philip of France is my godfather in chivalry," replied Arthur, drawing somewhat nearer to De Coucy, as if for protection from the wrath that was gathering on his uncle's brow, "and I would rather place my confidence in him, than in one who wronged my uncle Richard, who wronged my father Geoffrey, and who has broken his word even in respect to me, by thrusting me into a prison, when he promised his barons, as they themselves have told me, to leave me at liberty and to treat me well. He that breaks his word is no good knight, and I tell thee, John of Anjou, thou art false and foresworn!"

John lost his habitual command over his countenance in the excess of his wrath; and his features seemed actually to change under the vehemence of his passion. He set his teeth; he clenched his left hand, as if he would have buried his fingernails in the palm; and, thrusting his right under his crimson mantle, he evidently drew some weapon from its sheath. But at that moment, De Coucy, taking one stride in advance, opposed himself between the King and his nephew, and with his head thrown back, and his broad chest displayed, prepared at all risks to seize the tyrant, and dash him to atoms if he offered any violence to the unhappy youth that fortune had cast into his power.

John, however, possessed not the heart, even had he been armed in proof, to encounter a knight like De Coucy, though unarmed; and, sheathing again his dagger, he somewhat smoothed his look.

"By St. Paul!" he cried, taking pains, however, not to affect coolness too suddenly, lest the rapidity of the transition should betray its falseness, but carefully letting his anger appear to be slowly subsiding—"by St. Paul! Arthur Plantagenet, thou wilt drive me mad! Wert thou not my brother's son, I would strike thee with my dagger! I came to thee, to give thee liberty, if this taste of imprisonment had taught thee to yield thy empty pretensions to a crown thou canst never win; and thou meetest me with abuse and insult. The consequences be on thine own head, minion! I have dungeons deeper than this, and chains that may weigh somewhat heavy on those frail limbs!"

"Neither dungeons nor chains," replied the gallant boy, firmly, "no, nor death itself, shall make me renounce my rights of birth! You judge me cowardly, by the tears I shed but now; but I tell thee, that though I be worn with this close prison, and broken by sorrow, I fear not to meet death, rather than yield what I am bound in honour to maintain. England, Anjou, Guyenne, Touraine, are mine in right of my father; Brittany comes to me from my mother, its heiress; and, even in the grave, my bones shall claim the land, and my tomb proclaim thee an usurper!"

"Ha!" said John, "ha!" and there was a sneering accent on the last monosyllable that was but too fatally explained afterwards. "Be it as thou wilt, fair nephew," he added, with a smile of dark and bitter meaning—"be it as thou wilt;" and he was turning to leave the apartment.

"Hold, sir, yet one moment!" cried De Coucy. "One word on my account. When I yielded my sword to William of Salisbury, your noble brother, it was under the express promise that I should be treated well and knightly; and he was bound, in delivering me to you, to make the same stipulation in my behalf. If he did do it, you have broken your word. If he did not do it, he has broken his; and one or other I will proclaim a false traitor, in every court of Europe."

John heard him to an end; and then, after eyeing him from head to foot in silence, with an air of bitter triumphant contempt, he opened the door and passed out, without deigning to make the least reply. The door closed behind him—the heavy bolts were pushed forward—and Arthur and De Coucy once more stood alone, cut off from all the world.

The young captive gazed on his fellow-prisoner for a moment or two, with a glance in which the agitation of a weakened frame and a depressed mind might be traced struggling with a sense of dignity and firmness.

De Coucy endeavoured to console him; but the Prince raised his hand with an imploring look, as if the very name of comfort were a mockery. "Have I acted well, sir knight?" he asked. "Have I spoken as became me?"

"Well and nobly have you acted, fair Prince," replied De Coucy; "with courage and dignity worthy your birth and station."

"That is enough, then!" said Arthur—"that is enough!" and, with a deep and painful sigh, he cast himself again upon the seat; and, once more burying his face on his arms, let the day flit by him without even a change of position.

In the meanwhile, De Coucy, with his arms folded on his breast, paced up and down the vaulted chamber, revolving thoughts nearly as bitter as those of his fellow-captive. Mirebeau had proved as fatal to him as to Arthur. It had cast down his all. Arthur had struck for kingdoms, and he had struck for glory and fortune—the object of both, however, was happiness, though the means of the one was ambition, and of the other, love. Both had cast their all upon the stake, and both had lost. He, too, had to mourn then the passing away of his last hopes, the bright dream of love, and all the gay and delightful fabrics that imagination had built up upon its fragile base. They had fallen in ruins round him; and his heart sickened when he thought of all that a long captivity might effect in extinguishing the faint, faint glimmering of hope which yet shone upon his fate.

Thus passed the hours till night began to fall; and all the various noises of the town,—the shouts of the boatmen on the river, the trampling of the horses in the streets, the busy buzz of many thousand tongues, the cries of the merchants in the highways, and the rustling tread of all the passers to and fro, which during the day had risen in a confused hum to the chamber in which they were confined, died one by one away; and nothing was at length heard but the rippling of the waters of the Seine, then at high tide, washing against the very foundations of the tower.

It was now the hour at which a lamp was usually brought them; and Arthur raised his head, as if anxious for its coming.

"Enguerand is late to-night," said he. "But I forgot I heard my uncle discharge him from his office. Perhaps the new governor will not give us any light. Yet, hark! I hear his footstep. He is lighting the lantern in the passage."

He was apparently right, for steps approached; stopping twice for a moment or two, as if to fulfil some customary duty, and then coming nearer, they paused at the door of their prison. The bolts were withdrawn, and a stranger, bearing a lamp, presented himself. His face was certainly not very prepossessing, but it was not strikingly otherwise; and Arthur, who with a keen though timid eye scanned every line in his countenance, was beginning in some degree to felicitate himself on the change of his jailer, when the stranger turned and addressed him in a low and somewhat unsteady voice.

"My lord," said he, "you must follow me; as I am ordered to give you a better apartment. The sire De Coucy must remain here till the upper chamber is prepared."

Fear instantly seized upon Arthur. "I will not leave him," cried he, running round the pillar, and clinging to De Coucy's arm. "This chamber is good enough: I want no other."

"Your hand is not steady, sirrah!" said De Coucy, taking the lamp from the man, and holding it to his pale face. "Your lip quivers, and your cheek is as blanched as a templar's gown."

"'Tis the shaking fever I caught in the marshes by Du Clerc," replied the other; "but what has that to do with the business of Prince Arthur, beau sire?"

"Because we doubt foul play, varlet," replied De Coucy, "and you speak not with the boldness of good intent."

"If any ill were designed, either to you or to the Prince," replied the man, more boldly, "'twould be easily accomplished, without such ceremony. A flight of arrows, shot through your doorway, would leave you both as dead as the saints in their graves."

"That is true, too!" answered De Coucy, looking to Arthur, who still clung close to his arm. "What say you, my Prince?"

"It matters little what the Duke says, beau sire," said the jailer, interposing, "for he *must* come. Several of the great barons have returned to the court sooner than the King expected; and he would not have them find Prince Arthur here, it seems. So, if he come not by fair means, I must e'en have up the guard, and take him to his chamber by force."

"Ha!" said Arthur, somewhat loosening his hold of De Coucy's arm. "What barons are returned, sayest thou?"

"I know not well," said the jailer, carelessly; "Lord Pembroke I saw go by, and I heard of good William with the Longsword; but I marked not the names of the others, though I was told them."

Arthur looked to De Coucy as if for advice. "The ague fit has marvellously soon passed," said the knight, fixing his eyes sternly upon the stranger. "By the holy rood! if I thought that thou playedst us false, I would dash thy brains out against the wall!"

"I play you not false, sir knight," replied the man, in an impatient tone. "Come, my lord," he continued, to Arthur, "come quickly, for come you must. You will find some fresh apparel in the other chamber. To-morrow they talk of having you to the court; for these proud lords, they say, murmur at your being kept here."

There was a vague suspicion of some treachery still rested on the mind of De Coucy. The man's story was probable. It was more than probable, it was very likely; but yet the knight did not believe it, he knew not why. On Arthur, however, it had its full effect. He was aware that lord Pembroke, together with several of the greater barons of England, had wrung a promise for his safety, from King John, long before the relief of Mirebeau; and he doubted not that to their remonstrance he owed this apparent intention to alleviate his imprisonment.

"I must leave you, I am afraid, beau sire De Coucy," said the Prince. "I would fain stay here; but, I fear me, it is vain to resist."

"I fear me so too," replied the knight. "Farewell, my noble Prince! We shall often think of each other, though separated. Farewell!"

De Coucy took the unhappy boy in his arms, and pressed him for a moment to his heart, as if he had been parting with a brother or a child. He could no way explain his feelings at that moment. They had long been companions in many of those bitter hours which endear people to each other, more perhaps than even hours of mutual happiness; but there was something in his bosom beyond the pain of parting with a person whose fate had even thus been united with his own. He felt that he saw Arthur Plantagenet for the last time; and he gave him, as it were, the embrace of the dying.

He would not, however, communicate his own apprehensions to the bosom of the Prince; and, unfolding his arms, he watched him while, with a step still hesitating, he approached the doorway.

The jailer followed, and held open the door for him to pass out. Arthur, however, paused for a moment, and turned a timid glance towards De Coucy, as if there was some misdoubting in his bosom too; then, suddenly passing his hand over his brow, as if to clear away irresolution, he passed the doorway.

The instant he entered the passage beyond, he stopped, exclaiming, "It is my uncle!" and turned to rush back into the cell; but before he could accomplish it, or De Coucy could start forward to assist him, the new jailer passed out, pushed the unhappy Prince from the threshold, and shutting the door, fastened it with bolt after bolt.

"Now, minion," cried a voice without, which De Coucy could not doubt was that of King John, "wilt thou brave me as thou didst this morning?—Begone, slave!" he added, apparently speaking to the jailer; "quick! begone!" and then again turning to his nephew, he poured upon him a torrent of vehement and angry vituperation.

In that dark age such proceedings could have but one purpose, and De Coucy, comprehending them at once, glanced round the apartment in search of some weapon wherewith he might force the door; but it was in vain—nothing presented itself. The door was cased with iron, and the strength of Hercules would not have torn it from its hinges. Glaring then like a lion in a cage, the knight stood before it, listening for what was to follow,—doubting not for a moment the fearful object of the bad and bloodthirsty monarch,—his heart swelling with indignation and horror, and yet perfectly impotent to prevent the crime that he knew was about to be perpetrated.

"John of Anjou!" he cried, shouting through the door, "bloodthirsty tyrant! beware what you do! Deeply shall you repent your baseness, if you injure but a hair of his head! I will brand your name with shame throughout Europe! I will publish it before your barons to your teeth! You are overheard, villain, and your crime shall not sleep in secret!"

But, in the dreadful scene passing without, neither nephew nor uncle seemed to heed his call. There was evidently a struggle, as if the King endeavoured to free himself from the agonized clasp of Arthur, whose faint voice was heard, every now and then, praying in vain for mercy, at the hands of the hard-hearted tyrant, in whose power he was. At length the struggle seemed to grow fainter. A loud horrific cry rang echoing through the passages; and then a heavy, deadly fall, as if some mass of unelastic clay were cast at once upon the hollow stone of the pavement. Two or three deep groans followed; and then a distinct blow, as if a weapon of steel, stabbed through some softer matter, struck at last against a block of stone. A retreating step was heard; then whispering voices; then, shortly after, the paddling of a boat in the water below the tower—a heavy plunge in the stream—and all was silent.*

CHAPTER XXXII.

No language can express the joy that spread over the face of France, when the first peal from the steeples of the churches announced that the interdict was raised—that the nation was once more to be held as a Christian people—that the barrier was cast down which had separated it from the pale of the church. Labour, and care, and sorrow, seemed suspended. The whole country rang with acclamations; and so crowded were the churches, when the gates were first thrown open, that several hundred serfs were crushed to death in the struggle for admission.

Every heart was opened—every face beamed with delight; and the aspect of the whole land was as glad and bright as if salvation had then first descended upon earth. There were but two beings, in all the realm, to whom that peal sounded unjoyfully: and to them it rang like the knell of death. Agnes de Meranie heard it on her knees, and mingled her prayers with tears. Philip Augustus listened to it with a dark and frowning brow; and, striding up and down his solitary hall, he commented on each echoing clang, with many a deep and bitter thought. "They rejoice," said he, mentally,—"they rejoice in my misery. They ring a peal to celebrate my disappointment; but each stroke of that bell breaks a link of the chain that held them together, secure from my vengeance. Let them beware! Let them beware! or that peal shall be the passing bell to many a proud knight and rebellious baron."

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* The French writers of that day almost universally agree in attributing the death of Arthur to John's own hand. The English writers do not positively deny it, and we have indubitable proof that such was the general rumour through all the towns and castles of Europe at the time.—See Guill. Guiart. Guill. de Nangis. Guill. le Breton. Mat. Paris, &c.

Philip's calculations were not wrong. During the existence of the interdict, the nobles of France had been held together in their opposition to the monarch by a bond entwined of several separate parts, which were all cut at once by the King's submission to the papal authority. The first tie had been general superstition; but this would have hardly proved strong enough to unite them powerfully together, had the cause of Philip's opposition to the church been anything but entirely personal. In his anger, too, the King had for a moment forgotten his policy, and added another tie to that which existed before. Instead of courting public opinion to his support, he had endeavoured to compel his unwilling barons to co-operate in his resistance; and by severity and oppression, wherever his will was opposed, had complicated the bond of union amongst his vassals, which the interdict had first begun to twine.

The moment, however, that the papal censure was removed, all those who had not really suffered from the King's wrath fell off from the league against him; and many of the others, on whom his indignation had actually fallen, whether from blind fear or clear-sighted policy, judged that safety was no longer to be found but in his friendship, and made every advance to remove his anger.

Philip repelled none. Those on whose services he could best rely, and whose aid was likely to be most useful, he met with courtesy and frankness, remitted the fines he had exacted, restored the feofs he had forfeited, and, by the voluntary reparation of the oppression he had committed, won far more upon opinion than he had lost by the oppression itself. Those, however, who still murmured, or held back, he struck unsparingly. He destroyed their strongholds, he forfeited their feofs, and thus, joining policy and vengeance, he increased his own power, he punished the rebellious, he scared his enemies, and he added many a fair territory to his own domain.

The eyes of the Pope were still upon France; and seeing that the power for which he had made such an effort was falling even by the height to which he had raised it; that the barons were beginning to sympathize and co-operate with the King; and that those who still remained in opposition to the monarch were left now exposed to the full effects of his anger; Innocent resolved at once to make new efforts, both by private intrigue and by another daring exercise of his power, to establish firmly what he had already gained.

Amidst those who still remained discontented in France, he spared no means to maintain that discontent; and amidst Philip's external enemies he spread the project of that tremendous league, which afterwards, gathering force like an avalanche, rolled on with overwhelming power, in spite of all the efforts which Innocent at last thought fit to oppose to it, when he found that the mighty engine which he had first put in motion threatened to destroy himself. At the same time, to give these schemes time to acquire maturity and strength, and to break the bond of union which was always existing between a brave nation and a warlike monarch, he prepared to interpose between John of England and Philip Augustus, and to command the latter, with new threats of excommunication in case of disobedience, to abandon the glorious course that he was pursuing in person on the right of the Loire, at the moment when we have seen him despatch Arthur to carry on the war on the left.

It was somewhere about the period of the events we have related in our last chapter, and winter had compelled Philip to close the campaign which he had been pursuing against John with his wonted activity, when, one morning, as he sat devising his plans of warfare for the coming year, a conversation to the following effect took place between him and Guerin.

"—And then for Rouen!" said the King. "Thus cut off from all supplies, as I have showed you, and beleaguered by such an army as I can bring against it, it cannot hold out a month. But we must be sudden, Guerin, in our movements, carefully avoiding any demonstration of our intentions, till we sit down before the place, lest John should remove our poor Arthur, and thus foil us in the chief point of our enterprise. Three more such bright sunshining mornings as this, and I will call my men to the muster. God send us an early spring!"

"I fear me much, sire, that the Pope will interfere," replied Guerin; "repeated couriers are passing between Rome and England. He has already remonstrated strongly against the war; and, I little doubt, will endeavour, by all means, to put a stop to it."

"Ha, say'st thou?" said the King, looking up, with a smile, from a rude plan of the city of Rouen, round which he was drawing the lines of an encampment. "God send he may interfere, Guerin! He has triumphed over me once, good friend. It is time that I should triumph over him."

"But are you sure of being able to do so, sire?" demanded Guerin, with his usual simple frankness, putting the naked truth before the King's eyes, without one qualifying phrase. "The pleasure of resistance would, methinks, be too dear bought, at the expense of a second defeat. The Pope is strengthening himself by alliances. But yesterday the Duke of Burgundy informed me, that six successive messengers from the holy see had passed through his territories within a month, all either bound to Otho the Emperor, or to Ferrand, Count of Flanders."

Philip listened with somewhat of an abstracted air. His eye fixed upon vacancy, as if he were gazing on the future; and yet it was evident that he listened still, for a smile of triumphant consciousness in his own powers glanced from time to time across his lip, as the minister touched upon the machinations of his enemies.

"I fear me, sire," continued Guerin, "that your bold resistance to the will of the pontiff has created you at Rome an enemy that it will not be easy to appease."

"God send it!" was all Philip's reply, uttered with the same absent look, as if his mind was still busy with other matters. "God send it, Guerin! God send it!"

The minister was mute; and, after a momentary pause on both sides, Philip Augustus started up, repeating in a louder voice, as if impatient of the silence, "God send it, I say, Guerin! for, if he does commit that gross mistake in meddling in matters where he has no pretence of religious authority to support him in the eyes of the superstitious crowd, by the Lord that lives! I will crush him like a hornet that has stung me!"

"But, my lord, consider," said Guerin, "consider that——"

"Consider!" interrupted the King. "I have considered, Guerin! Think you I am blind, my friend? Think you I do not see? I tell thee, Guerin, I look into the workings of this Pope's mind as clearly as ever did prophet of old into the scheme of futurity. He hates me nobly, I know it—with all the venom of a proud and passionate heart. He hates me profoundly, and I hate him as well. Thank God for that! I would not meet him but on equal terms; and, I tell thee, Guerin, I see all which that hatred may produce."

The King paused, and took two or three strides in the apartment, as if to compose himself, and give his thoughts a determinate form; for he had lashed himself already into no small anger, with the very thoughts of the hatred between the proud prelate and himself. In a few moments he stopped, and, sitting down again, looked up in the face of the minister, somewhat smiling at his own vehemence. Yet there was something bitter in the smile too, from remembrance of the events which had first given rise to his enmity towards the Pope. After this had passed away, he leaned his cheek upon his hand, and, still looking up, marked the emphasis of his discourse with the other hand, laying it from time to time on the sleeve of the minister's gown.

"I see it all, Guerin," said he, "and I am prepared for all. This arrogant prelate, with his pride elevated by his late triumph, and his heart embittered by my resistance, will do all that man can do to overthrow me. In the first place, he will endeavour to stop my progress against that base unknightly King—John of Anjou: but he will fail, for my barons have already acknowledged the justice of the war; and I have already ten written promises to support me against Rome itself, should Rome oppose me. There is the engagement of the Duke of Burgundy. Read that."

Guerin took up the parchment to which the King pointed, and read a clear and positive agreement, on the part of the Duke of Burgundy, to aid Philip, with all his knights and vassals, against John of England, in despite of even the thunders of the church—to march and fight at his command during the whole of that warfare, how long soever it might last; and never either to lay down his arms, or to make peace, truce, or treaty, either with the King of England, or the bishop of Rome, without the express consent and order of Philip himself.

Guerin was surprised; for though he well knew that—notwithstanding his own office—the King transacted the greater part of the high political negotiations of the kingdom himself, and often without the entire knowledge of any one, yet he had hardly thought that such important arrangements could have been made totally unknown to him. It was so, however; and

Philip, not remarking his minister's astonishment—for, as we have said before, the countenance of Guerin was not very apt to express any of the emotions of his mind—proceeded to comment on the letter he had shown him.

"Ten such solemn agreements have I obtained from my great vassals," said he, "and each can bring full two thousand men into the field. But still, Guerin, it is not the immense power that this affords me—greater than I have ever possessed since I sat upon the throne of France—'tis not the power that yields me the greatest pleasure; but it is, that herein is the seed of resistance to the papal authority; and I will water it so well, that it shall grow up into a tall tree, under whose shadow I may sit at ease.—Mark me, Guerin, and remember! Henceforth, never shall an interdict be again cast upon the realm of France,—never shall pope or prelate dare to excommunicate a French king; and should such a thing be by chance attempted, it shall be but as the idle wind that hisses at its own emptiness. The seed is there," continued he, striking his hand proudly on the parchment,—"the seed is there, and it shall spread far and wide."

"But even should the greater part of your barons enter into this compact, sire," said Guerin, "you may be crushed by a coalition from without. I do not wish to be the prophet of evil; but I only seek to place the question in every point of view. Might not then, sire, the coalition of the Pope, the Emperor, and the King of England——?"

"Might wage war with me, but could never conquer, if France were true to France," interrupted the monarch. "Guerin, I tell thee, that an united nation was never overcome, and never shall be, so long as the world does last. The fate of a nation is always in its own hands. Let it be firm, and it is safe."

"But we unfortunately know, sire," said the minister, with a doubtful shake of the head, "that France is not united. Many, many of the royal vassals, and those some of the most powerful, cannot be depended on. Ferrand, Count of Flanders, for instance. I need not tell you, sire, that he waits but an opportunity to throw off his allegiance. There are many more. Count Julian of the Mount has been openly a follower of the court of John of England; and though he is now on his lands, doubtless preparing all for revolt, he has left his daughter, they say, as security for his faith at the court of Rouen. May we not suppose, sire, that, when the moment comes which is to try men's hearts in this affair, we shall find thousands who—either from fear of the papal censure—or from personal enmity—or a treacherous and fickle disposition—or some one of all the many, many circumstances that sow treasons in time of danger and trouble—will fall off from you at the instant you want them most, and go over to swell the ranks of your enemies?"

"I do not believe it," replied Philip, thoughtfully,—"I do not believe it! The Pope's authority in a war unconnected with any affair of the church will have small effect, and if exerted, will, like a reed in a child's hand, break itself at the first impotent blow. Besides, I much doubt whether Innocent would now exert it against me if it were to be used in favour of Otho of Saxony. He hates me, true! He hates me more than he hates any other King; but yet, Guerin, but yet I see a thread mingling with the web of yon Pope's policy that may make it all run down. Again, the war against John is a national, and must be a popular, war. I will take care that it shall not be stretched till France is weary of it; and John's weakness, joined with Innocent's insolence, will soon make it a war against the nation generally, not against the King personally. The barons will find that they are defending themselves, while they defend me; and I will divide the lands of him who turns traitor, amongst those that remain true. I tell thee, Guerin, I tell thee, I would not for the world that this Pope should slacken his hand, or abate one atom of his pride. He is sowing enemies, my friend; and he shall reap an iron harvest."

Philip's eyes flashed as his thoughts ran on into the future. His brow knit sternly; his hand clasped tight the edge of the table by which he was seated, and after a moment or two of silence, he burst forth:—"Let him but give me the means of accustoming my barons to resist his usurped power—one great victory—and then!"

"Then what, sire?" demanded the Hospitaller, calmly, his unimpassioned mind not following the quick and lightning-like turns of Philip's rapid feelings—"then, what?"

"Agnes!" exclaimed Philip, starting up and grasping Guerin's arm—"Agnes and vengeance! By Heaven! it glads my very soul to see Innocent's machinations against me—machinations that, either by the ingratitude of others, or my revenge, shall fall, certainly fall, like a thunderbolt on his head. Let him raise up pomp-loving Otho, that empty mockery of a Cæsar! Let him call in crafty, fickle, bloodthirsty John, with his rebellious disaffected barons! Let him join them with boasting Ferrand of Flanders! Let him add Italian craft to German stubbornness! Let him cast his whole weight of power upon the die! I will stake my being against it, and perish, or avenge my wrongs, and recover what I have lost!"

"I fear me, sire——" said Guerin.

"Speak not to me of fear!" interrupted the King. "I tell thee, good friend, that in my day I have seen but one man fit to cope with a king—I mean Richard of England. He is gone—God rest his soul!—but he was a good knight and a great warrior, and might have been a great king, if fate had spared him till time had taken some of the lion's worst part from his heart, and sprinkled some cooler wisdom on his brow. But he is gone, and has left none like him behind. As for the others, I will make their necks but steps to gain the height from which my arm may reach to Rome."

"'Tis a far way to Rome! sire," replied Guerin, "and many have stretched their arm to reach it, and failed in the attempt. I need not remind you of the Emperor Frederic, sire, who struggled in vain to resist."

"Nor of Philip of France, you would say," interposed the King, with a gloomy smile that implied perhaps pain, but not anger. "Philip of France!" he repeated, "who strove but to retain the wife of his bosom, when a proud priest bade him cast her from him—and he too failed! But Philip of France is not yet dead; and between the to-day and the to-morrow, which constitute life and death, much may be done. I failed, Guerin, it is true; but I failed by my own fault. My eyes dazzled with the mist of passion, I made many a sad mistake; but now, my eyes are open, my position is changed, and my whole faculties are bent to watch the errors of my adversaries, and to guard against any in myself. But we will speak no more of this. Were it to cost me crown and kingdom, life, and even renown, I would thank God for having given me the means of striking at least one blow for love and vengeance. We will speak no more of it. The day wears."

It needed not the science of an old courtier to understand what the King's last words implied; and Guerin instantly took his leave, and left the monarch alone.

The truth was, that to thoughts of ambition, schemes of policy, and projects of vengeance, other ideas had succeeded in the mind of Philip Augustus. His was a strange state of being. He lived, as it were, in two worlds. Like the king of old, he seemed to have two spirits. There was the one that, bright, and keen, and active, mingled in the busy scenes of politics and warfare, guiding, directing, raising up, and overthrowing; and there was another, still, silent, deep, in the inmost chambers of his heart, yet sharing more, far more, than half the kingdom of his thoughts, and prompting or commanding all the actions of the other. It was this spirit that now claimed its turn to reign exclusively; and Philip gave up all his soul to the memory of Agnes de Meranie. Here he had a world apart from aught else on earth, wherein the spirit of deep feeling swayed supreme; and thence issued that strong control which his heart ever exercised over the bright spirit of genius and talent, with which he was so eminently endowed.

He thought of Agnes de Meranie. The fine chord of association had been touched a thousand times during his conversation with Guerin, and at every mention of her name, at every thought that connected itself with her unhappy fate, fresh sorrows and regrets, memories sweet, though painful,—most painful, that they were but memories,—came crowding on his heart, and claiming all its feelings. As soon as the minister was gone, he called his page, and bade him see if the canon of St. Berthe's was in attendance. The boy returned in a few minutes, followed by the wily priest, whom we have already heard of as the confessor of Agnes de Meranie. Philip's feelings towards him were very different from those he entertained towards Guerin. There was that certain sort of doubt in the straightforwardness of his intentions, which a cunning man,—let him cover his heart with what veil of art he will,—can hardly ever escape. Philip had no cause to doubt, and yet he doubted. Nor did he love the plausible kind of eloquence, which the priest had some pride in displaying; and therefore he treated him with that proud, cold dignity, which left the subject but little opportunity of exercising his oratory upon the King.

"Good morrow, father," he said, bending his brows upon the canon: "when last I saw you, you were about to speak to me concerning the Queen, before persons whom I admit not to mingle in my private affairs. Now answer me, as I shall question you, and remember, a brief reply is the best. When saw you my wife, the Queen?"

"It was on the fifth day of the last week," replied the canon, in a low sweet tone of voice, "and it was with sorrow mingled with hope——"

"Bound yourself, in your reply, by my question, sir clerk," said the King, sternly. "I ask you neither your sorrows nor your hopes. How was the Queen in health?"

"But frail, if one might judge by her appearance, sire," answered the priest; "she was very pale, and seemed weak; but she said that she was well, and indeed, sweet lady, she was like, if I may use a figure "

"Use none, sir," interrupted the King. "Did she take exercise?"

"Even too much, I fear, beau sire," replied the canon. "For hours, and hours, she wanders through the loneliest parts of the forest, sending from her all her attendants——"

"Ha! alone?" cried the King: "does she go alone?"

"Entirely, sire," replied the canon of St. Berthe's, whose hopes of a bishopric in Istria were not yet extinct. "I spoke with the leech Rigord, whom you commanded to watch over her health; and he did not deny, that the thing most necessary to the lady's cure was the air of her own land, and the tending of her own relations; for he judges by her wanderings, that her mind is hurt, and needs soothing and keeping afar from the noisy turbulence of the world; as we keep a sick man's chamber from the glare of the mid-day sun."

Philip heard him out, fixing his eyes on the wily priest's face, as if seeking to trace the cunning in his countenance, that he was sure was busy at his heart; but the canon kept his look bent upon the ground while speaking; and, when he had done, judging that his words pleased, by being indulged in a much longer speech than Philip had ever before permitted him to make, he raised his eyes to the monarch's face, with a look of humiliated self-confidence, which, though it betrayed none of the secrets of his wishes, did not succeed in producing any favourable impression on the King.

"Begone!" said the monarch, in not the most gentle tone possible; but then, instantly sensible that his dislike to the man might be unjust, and that his haughtiness was at all events ungenerous, he added, more mildly, "Leave me, good father—I would be alone. Neglect not your charge, and you shall feel the King's gratitude."

The canon of St. Berthe's bowed low in silence, and withdrew, pondering, with not a little mortification, on the apparent unsuccessfulness of schemes which, though simple enough, if viewed with the eyes of the world at present, when cunning, like every other art, has reached the corruption of refinement, were deeply politic in that age, when slyness was in the simplicity of its infancy.

In the meanwhile, Philip Augustus paused on the same spot where the priest had left him, in deep thought. "Alone!" muttered he,—"alone! I have vowed a deep vow, neither to touch her lip, nor enter her dwelling, nor to speak one word to her, for six long months, without, prior to that period's return, a council shall have pronounced on my divorce. But I have not vowed not to see her. I can bear this no longer! Yon priest tortures me with tales of her sickness! He must have some dark motive! Yet, she may be sick, too.—Ho! without there!"

The page who had before conducted the canon of St. Berthe's to the presence of the King, now presented himself again.

"Gilbert!" said the monarch, "come hither, boy! Thou art of noble birth; and art faithful and true, I well believe. Now, doubtless, thou hast learnt so much of knightly service, that you know, the page who babbles of his lord's actions is held dishonoured and base.—Fear not, youth, I am not angry. If I find you discreet, this hand shall some day lay knighthood on your shoulder; but, if I find you gossip of my deeds, it shall strike your ears from your head, and send you forth like a serf, into the fields. With that warning, speed to the west hall of the armoury. Thou wilt there find, in the third window from the door, on the left hand, a casque, with the *eventaille* cut like a cross; a hauberk, with a steel hood; a double-handed sword; a table of attente, and other things fitting. Bring them to me hither, and be quick."

The page sped away, proud to be employed by the monarch on an errand usually reserved for his noblest squires; and returned in a few minutes, bearing the hauberk and the greaves; for the load of the whole armour would have been too much for his young arms to lift. Another journey brought the casque and sword; and a third, the brassards and plain polished shield, called a table of attente. The whole armour was one of those plain and unornamented suits much used in the first fervour of the crusades, when every other decoration than that of the cross was considered superfluous.

Without other aid than the page could afford, whose hands trembled with delight at their new occupation, Philip arrayed himself in the arms that had been brought him; and, taking care to remove every trace by which he could be recognised, he put on the casque, which, opening at the side, had no visor, properly so called; but which, nevertheless, entirely concealed his face, the only opening, when the clasps were fastened, being a narrow cruciform aperture in the front, to admit the light and air. When this was done, he wrote upon a slip of parchment the simple words, "The King would be alone," and gave them to the page, as his warrant for preventing any one from entering his apartment during his absence. He then ordered him to pass the bridge, from the island to the tower of the Louvre, and to bring a certain horse, which he described, from the stables of that palace, to the end of the garden wall; and waiting some minutes after his departure, to give time for the execution of his commands, the King rose, and, choosing the least frequented of the many staircases in the palace, proceeded towards the street.

In the court he encountered several of his serjeants-at-arms, and his other attendants, who gazed coldly at the strange knight, as he seemed, who, thus encased in complete steel, passed through them, without offering or receiving any salutation. Thence he proceeded into the busy streets; where, so strong was the force of habit, that Philip started more than once at the want of the reverence to which he was accustomed; and had to recall the disguise he had assumed, ere he could fancy the disrespect unintentional.

At the spot he had named, he found the page with the horse; but the sturdy groom, whose charge it was in the stable, stood there also, fully resolved to let no one mount him without sufficient authority: nor was it till the sight of the King's signet showed him in whose presence he stood, that he ceased his resistance. The groom, suddenly raised to an immense height, in his own conceit, by having become, in any way, a sharer in the King's secret, winked to the page, and held the stirrup while the monarch mounted.

Philip sprang into the saddle. Laying his finger on the aperture of the casque, to enjoin secresy, and adding, in a stern tone, "On your life!" he turned his horse's head, and galloped away.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

It is strange to read what countries once were, and to compare the pictures old chroniclers have handed down, with the scenes as they lie before us at present. In the neighbourhood of great capitals, however, it is, that the hand ofman wages the most inveterate war with nature; and were I to describe the country through which Philip Augustus passed, as he rode quickly onward towards Mantes, the modern traveller who has followed that road would search his memory in vain for scenery that no longer exists. Deep marshes, ancient forests, many a steep hill and profound valley, with small scattered villages, "like angel visits, few and far between," surrounded the monarch on his onward way; and, where scarcely a hundred yards can now be traversed without meeting many and various of the biped race, Philip Augustus rode over long miles without catching a glimpse of the human form divine.

The King's heart beat high with the thoughts of seeing her he loved, were it but for one short casual glance at a distance; but, even independent of such feelings, he experienced a delight, a gladness, a freedom in the very knowledge that he was concealed from all the world; and that, while wrapped in the plain arms that covered him, he was liberated from all the slavery of dignity, and the importunity of respect. There was a degree of romance in the sensation of his independence, which we have all felt, more or less, at one time of our lives, even surrounded as we are by all the shackles of a most unromantic society, but which affected Philip to a thousand-fold extent, both from his position as a king, and from the wild and chivalrous age in which he lived.

Thus he rode on, amidst the old shadowy oaks that overhung his path, meditating dreams and adventures that might almost have suited the knight of La Mancha, but which, in that age, were much more easily attainable than in the days of Cervantes.

Of course, all such ideas were much modified by Philip's peculiar cast of mind, and by his individual situation; but still the scenery, the sensation of being freed from restraint, and the first bland air, too, of the early spring, all had their effect; and as he had himself abandoned the tedious ceremonies of a court, his mind in sympathy, as it seemed, quitted all the intricate and painful mazes of policy, to roam in bright freedom amidst the wilds of feeling and imagination.

Such dreams, however, did not produce a retarded pace, for it wanted little more than an hour to mid-day; a long journey was before him, and his only chance of accomplishing his purpose was in arriving during those hours that Agnes might be supposed to wander alone in the forest, according to the account of the canon of St. Berthe's. Philip, therefore, spurred on at full speed, and, avoiding as much as possible the towns, arrived near the spot where Rosny now stands, towards three o'clock.

At that spot, the hills which confine the course of the Seine fall back in a semicircle from its banks, and leave it to wander through a wide rich valley for the distance of about half a league, before they again approach close to the river at Rolleboise.

At the latter place, however, the chalky banks become high and precipitous, leaving, in many places, but a narrow road between themselves and the water; though, at other spots, the river takes a wide turn away, and interposes a broad meadow between its current and the cliffs.

In those days, the whole of the soil in that part of the country was covered with wood. The hills and the valleys, and the plains round Rosny and Rolleboise, were all forest ground; and the trees absolutely dipped themselves in the Seine. To the left, a little before reaching the chapel of Notre Dame de Rosny, the road on which Philip had hitherto proceeded turned off into the heart of Normandy; and such was the direct way to the castle in which Agnes de Meranie had fixed her dwelling; but to the right, nearly in the same line as the present road to Rouen, lay another lesser path, which, crossing the woods in the immediate vicinity of the château, was the one that Philip judged fit to follow.

The road here first wound along down to the very banks of the Seine; and then quitting it at the little hamlet of Rolleboise, mounted the steep hill, and dipping down rapidly again, skirted between the high chalky banks on the left, and a small plain of underwood that lay on the right towards the river.

Dug deep into the heart of the cliff, were then to be seen, as now, a variety of caves, said to have been hollowed by the heathen Normans on their first invasion of France, some yawning and bare, but most of them covered over with underwood and climbing plants.

By the side of one of the largest of these had grown a gigantic oak, which, stretching its arms above, formed a sort of shady bower round the entrance. Various signs of its being inhabited struck Philip's eye as he approached, such as a distinct pathway from the road to the mouth, and the marks of recent fire; but, as there was at that time scarcely a forest in France which had not its hermit—and as many of these, from some strange troglodytical propensity, had abjured all habitations made with hands—the sight at first excited no surprise in the bosom of the monarch. It was different, however, when, as he passed by, he beheld hanging on the lowest of the oak's leafless branches, a knight's gauntlet, and he almost fancied that one of the romances of the day were realized, and that the next moment he should behold some grave enchanter, or some learned sage, issue from the bowels of the rock, and call upon him to achieve some high and perilous adventure.

He rode by, notwithstanding, without meeting with any such interruption; and, thoroughly acquainted with every turn in the woods, he proceeded to a spot where he could see the castle, and a portion of several of the roads which led to it; and, pushing in his horse amongst the withered leaves of the underwood, he waited in anxious hopes of catching but a glance of her he loved.

It is in such moments of expectation, that imagination is often the most painfully busy, especially when she has some slight foundation of reality whereon to build up fears. Philip pictured to himself Agnes, as he had first seen her in the full glow of youth, and health, and beauty; and he then remembered her as she had left him, when a few short months of sorrow and anxiety had blasted the rose upon her cheek, and extinguished the light of her eye. Yet he felt he loved her more deeply, more painfully, the pale and faded thing she was then, than when she had first blessed his arms in all the pride of loveliness; and many a sad inference did he draw, from the rapidity with which that change had taken place, in regard to what she might have since undergone under the pressure of more stinging and ascertained calamity. Thus, while he watched, he conjured up many a painful fear, till reality could scarcely have matched his anticipations.

No Agnes, however, appeared; and the King began to deem that the report of the confessor had been false, when he suddenly perceived the flutter of white garments on the battlements of the castle. In almost every person, some one of the senses is, as it were, peculiarly connected with memory. In some it is the ear; and sounds that have been heard in former days will waken, the moment they are breathed, bright associations of lands, and scenes, and hours, from which they are separated by many a weary mile, and many a long obliterating year. In others, it is the eye, and forms that have been once seen are never forgot; while those that are well known, scarce need the slightest, most casual glance, to be recognised at once, though the distance may be great, and their appearance but momentary. This was the case with Philip Augustus; and though what he discerned was but as a vacillating white spot on the dark grey walls of the castle, it needed no second glance to tell him that *there* was Agnes de Meranie. He tied his horse to one of the shrubs, and with a beating heart sprang out into the road, to gain a nearer and more satisfactory view of her he loved best on earth.

Secure in the concealment of his armour, he approached close to the castle, and came under the wall, just as Agnes, followed by one of her women, turned upon the battlements. Her cheek was indeed ashy pale, with the clear line of her brown eyebrow marked more distinctly than ever on the marble whiteness of her forehead. She walked with her hands clasped, in an attitude that spoke that utter hopelessness in all earth's things, which sees no resource on this side of the grave; and her eyes were fixed unmovingly on the ground.

Philip gazed as he advanced, not doubting that the concealment of his armour was sure; but at that moment the clang of the steel woke Agnes from her reverie. She turned her eyes to where he stood. Heaven knows whether she recognised him or not; but she paused suddenly, and stretching her clasped hands towards him, she gazed as if she had seen a vision, murmured a few inarticulate words, and fell back into the arms of the lady who followed her.

Philip sprang towards the gate of the castle, and already stood under the arch of the barbican, when the vow that the Pope had exacted from him not to pass the threshold of her dwelling till the lawfulness of his divorce was decided, flashed across his mind, and he paused. Upon a promise, that that decision should be within one half year, he had pledged his knightly honour to forbear—that decision had not been given; but the half year was not yet expired, and the tie of a knightly vow he dared not violate, however strong might be the temptation.

The grate of the barbican was open, and at the distance of a few yards within its limits stood several of the soldiers of the guard, with the prévôt. Not a little surprise was excited amongst these by the sudden approach of an armed knight, and at his as sudden pause.

"What seek ye, sir knight?" demanded the prévôt, — "what seek ye here?"

"News of the Queen's health," replied the monarch. "I am forbidden to pass the gate; but, I pray thee, sir prévôt, send to inquire how fares the Queen this morning."

The officer willingly complied, though he somewhat marvelled at the stranger's churlishness in resting without the threshold. The reply brought from within, by the messenger, was that the Queen had been seized but a few minutes before by one of those swoons that so much afflicted her, but that she had already recovered, and was better and more cheerful since. The message, the man added, had been dictated by the lady herself, which showed that she was better indeed, for in general she seldom spoke to any one.

It fell like a sweet drop of balm upon Philip's heart. There was something told him that he had been recognised, and that Agnes had been soothed and pleased, by the romantic mark of his love that he had given; that she had felt for him, and with him, and had dictated the reply he had received, in order to give back to his bosom the alleviation that his coming had afforded to her. With these sweet imaginations he fell into a deep reverie, and, forgetful of the eyes that were upon him, paused for several minutes before the barbican, and then, slowly returning on his steps, descended the hill to the thicket, where he had left his horse; and throwing the bridle over his arm, led him on the path by which he had come.

"The churl!" said one of the soldiers, looking after him. "He did not vouchsafe one word of thanks for our doing his errand."

"Another madman! I will warrant thee!" said a second archer.

"He is no madman that," replied the prévôt, thoughtfully. "Put your fingers on your lips, and hold your tongues, good fellows! I have heard that voice before;" and, with a meaning nod of the head, he quitted the barbican, and left the soldiers to unravel his mystery if they could.

In the meanwhile the King proceeded slowly on his way, chewing the cud of sweet and bitter fancies, till he came near the same range of caves which he had passed about an hour before. Everything was still in the same state; and no human being was visible. The gauntlet remained upon the tree, seemingly only to have been touched by the wind of heaven; and, scarcely thinking what he did, Philip approached, and reaching it with his hand, took it down from the bough to which it was suspended.

As he did so, however, a noise in the cave showed him that his action was not without a witness; and, in a moment after, a tall, powerful man issued forth, and advanced towards him. He was clothed in armour, somewhat rusted by the damp; but the fine tracery of gold, by which those parts that were of plate had been ornamented, was still visible; and the spurs and belt which he wore proclaimed him a knight. He held his casque in his hand, busying himself as he advanced to disentangle the lacings of it, as if in haste to put it on; and his head was bare, exposing a profusion of long tangled dark hair, which was just beginning to be slightly touched with grey. His face was as pale as ashes, and wan beyond all mortal wanness; and in his large dark eyes there shone a brilliant, wavering, uncertain fire, not to be mistaken for aught but insanity.

The King gazed on him, at once recognising his person; but hardly able to believe that, in the wild lunatic before him, he saw the calm, cold, tranquil Thibalt of Auvergne.

In the meanwhile the Count came forward, impatiently twisting in his haste the already tangled lacings of his helmet into still more intricate knots.

"Now, discourteous knight!—now!" cried he, glaring on the King,—"now will I do battle with thee on the cause; and make thee confess that she is Queen of France, and true and lawful wife of Philip the King! Wait but till I have laced my casque, and, on horse or on foot, I will give thee the lie! What! has the Pope at length sent thee to Mount Libanus to defy me? I tell thee, miscreant, I will prove it against him, and all his host!"

The first thought that passed through the brain of Philip Augustus, was the memory of his ancient hatred to the unfortunate Count d'Auvergne, and the revived desire of vengeance for the injury he believed him to have attempted against him. Those feelings, however, in their full force, soon left him; and pity for the unhappy state in which he saw him, though it could not remove his dislike, put a bar against his anger. "I come not to defy you, sir knight," said the King. "You mistake me. I am a stranger wandering this way——"

"The glove! the glove!" cried the Count, interrupting him. "You have taken down my glove—you have accepted the challenge. Have I not written it up all over Mount Libanus, that whoever denies her to be his lawful wife shall die? If you draw not your sword, I will cleave you down as a traitor, and proclaim you a coward too. In Jerusalem and in Ascalon, before the hosts of the crescent and the cross, I will brand you as a felon, a traitor, and a coward.—Draw, draw, if you be knight and noble!"

So saying, he cast his casque away from him on the ground; and, drawing his broad sword, rushed upon Philip with the fury of a lion. Self-defence became now absolutely necessary, for the King well knew that he was opposed to one of the best and most skilful knights of Christendom, whose madness was no hindrance to his powers as a man-at-arms; and consequently, loosing the bridle of his horse, he drew his sword, and prepared to repel the madman's attack."

The conflict was long and desperate, though, had not the natural generosity of his disposition interfered, the King possessed an infinite advantage over the Count d'Auvergne, whose head was, as we have said, totally undefended. He refrained, however, from aiming one blow at that vulnerable part of his antagonist's person, till his scruples had nearly cost him his life, by the rings of his hauberk giving way on his left shoulder. The Count d'Auvergne saw his advantage, and pressed on with all the blind fury of insanity, at the same time leaving his head totally unguarded. The heat of the combat had irritated the monarch, and he now found it necessary to sacrifice all other considerations to the safety of his own life. He opposed his shield, therefore, to the thundering blows of his adversary; and raising his heavy double-edged sword high above the Count's naked head, in another moment would have terminated his sorrows for ever, when the blow was suspended by a circumstance which shall be related hereafter.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

In the great hall of the ducal palace at Rouen, sat John, King of England, now the undisputed possessor of the British throne; and, though the blood of his nephew was scarce washed from his hands, and the record of his crime scarce dry in the annals of the world, he bore upon his lip that same idle smile, whose hideous lightness was the more dreadful when contrasted with the profound depravity of his heart. He was seated in an ivory chair, beneath a crimson dais, gorgeously arrayed after the fashion of the day, and surrounded with all the pomp of royalty. On his right hand stood the Earl of Pembroke, with bitter grief and indignation written in his curled lip and contracted brow, which found an answering expression in the countenance of the Lord Bagot, the Earl of Essex, and almost every English peer in the presence.

John saw their stern and discontented looks, and understood their import well; but, strange to say, the chief cause of his fear being removed by the death of Arthur, he felt a degree of triumphant joy in the angry sorrow of his barons; and calculated upon easily calming their irritation, before any new danger should arise to menace him. Indeed, with his usual false calculation, he already planned a new act of baseness, which, by punishing one who had contributed to the death of Arthur, by betraying him at Mirebeau, he hoped might, in some degree, satisfy those whom that death had rendered discontented; forgetting, in his utter ignorance of such a thing as virtue, that, in the eyes of the honest, one base act can never repair another.

Close before the King, on the tapestry, which covered the steps on which his throne was raised, and extended some way into the hall, stood no less a person than the Brabançois, Jodelle, now dressed in a fine tunic of purple cloth, with a baldric of cloth of gold supporting by his side a cross-hilted sword.

His air was the invariable air of an upstart, in which flippant, yet infirm self-conceit, struggles to supply the place of habitual self-possession, and in its eagerness defeats its object. Consummate vanity, when joined with grace, will sometimes supply the place of high breeding; but a man that doubts in the least is lost. Thus stood Jodelle, smiling in the plenitude, as he thought, of royal favour; yet, with irritable knowledge of his want of right to appear in such a presence, glancing his eye from time to time round the proud barons of England, who, occupied with thoughts of more dignified anger, scarcely condescended to despise him.

In the meanwhile, King John, as we have said, with a light and sneering smile upon his lips, amused himself with the conceited affectation of the Brabançois, who, enriched with the spoils of Mirebeau and several other towns in Poitou, now presented himself to claim the higher rewards which had been promised to his treachery. The King smiled; yet, in the dark recesses of his cruel heart, he at the very moment destined the man to death, with whom he jested as a favoured follower.

The simile of a cat and a mouse is almost as musty as the Prince of Denmark's proverb; and yet perhaps there is no other that would so aptly figure the manner in which John of England played with the traitor, of whose services he had availed himself to take his nephew prisoner.

"Well, beau sire Jodelle," said he, after the Brabançois had made his obeisance, "doubtless you have exercised the royal permission we gave you, to plunder our loving subjects of Poitou, to some purpose. Nay, your gay plumage speaks it. You were not feathered so, Sir Jodelle, when last we saw you. But our homely proverb has it, 'Fine feathers make fine birds.' Is it not so, Lord Pembroke?"

"Not always, sir,' answered the Earl, boldly. "I have known a vulture plumed like an eagle, yet not deceive a daw!"

John's brow darkened for an instant, but the next it was all clear again, and he replied, "Your lordship follows a metaphor as closely as a buzzard does a field mouse. Think you not, sire Jodelle, that our English lords have fine wits? Marry, if you had possessed as fine, you would have kept at a goodly distance from us all; for there are amongst us men that love you not, and you might chance to get one of those sympathetic knots tied round your neck that draw themselves the tighter the more you tug at them."

"I fear not, sire," replied Jodelle, though there was a sneering touch of earnest in the King's jests that made his cheek turn somewhat pale,—"I fear not; trusting that you will grant me your royal protection."

"That I will, man!—that I will!" replied the monarch, "and elevate you;" and he glanced his eyes round his court, to see if his jest was understood and appreciated. Some of the courtiers smiled, but the greater part still maintained their stern gravity; and John proceeded, applying to the coterel the terms of distinctions used towards knights, not without an idea of mortifying those who heard, as well as of mocking him to whom they were addressed. "Well, beau sire," he said, "and what gives us the pleasure of your worshipful presence at this time? Some business of rare import, doubtless, some noble or knightly deed to be done."

"I am ever ready to do what poor service I may, sire," replied Jodelle. "I come, therefore, to tell you that I have raised the band of free-companions, for which you gave me your royal permission, and to beg you to take order that they may have the pay* and appointments which you promised."

"Thy demands shall be satisfied on that head," replied John, in a serious and condescending tone, calculated to allay all fears in the mind of Jodelle, if he had begun to conceive any. "By my faith! we shall need every man-at-arms we can get, whether vassal or Brabançois, for Philip of France threatens loud.—Now, Sir Jodelle, what more?"

"Simply this order on your royal treasury," replied Jodelle, quite reassured by the King's last words. "Your treasurer refuses to acquit it, without another direct warrant from you."

"Give it to me," said the King, holding out his hand, into which Jodelle, somewhat unwillingly, placed the order for ten thousand crowns, which he had received as the reward of his treachery. "And now," proceeded John, "we will at once arrange these affairs without the least delay, for diligence in rendering justice to all men is a kingly virtue. In the first place, then, for the appointments of the free-companions raised by this worthy captain. We command you, William Humet,† to send them off straight to the bands of our dearly-beloved Mercader, there to be drafted in, man by man, so that, being well used and entertained, they may serve us truly and faithfully."

"But, sire!" exclaimed Jodelle, turning as pale as death.

"Tut, man! tut!" cried the King, "we will find means to satisfy every one. Hear us to an end. In regard to this order on our royal treasury—stand forward, John of Wincaunton! You are deputy-prévôt, are you not?"

A short, stout, bull-necked sort of person came forth from behind the throne, and placing himself beside Jodelle, bowed in assent to the King's question.

"Well, then," proceeded John, "by my faith! you must serve me for deputy-treasurer also, for want of a better."

John of Wincaunton, who had a keen apprehension of the King's jests in this sort, bowed again, and making a sign, by holding up two of his fingers, so as to be seen by a line of men-at-arms behind the circle of nobles who occupied the front of the scene, he laid his other hand upon Jodelle's arm, while two stout soldiers ran round and seized him from behind. Such precautions, however, were utterly unnecessary, for the first touch of the prévôt's hand upon his arm operated like Prospero's wand. All power and strength seemed to go out of the Brabançois' limbs; his arms hung useless by his side, his knees bent, and his nether lip quivered with the very act of fear.

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* It has been asserted that these troops received no pay, but supported themselves by plunder. I find them, however, called mercenaries in more than one instance, which clearly implies that they fought for hire.

† Constable of Normandy in the year 1200, and following, as appears from a treaty between John and Philip, concluded at Gueuleton.

"Take the caitiff," cried John, frowning on him bitterly,—"take him, prévôt; carry him to the very bound of Normandy, and there see you acquit me of all obligation towards him. Hang him up between Normandy and France, that all men of both lands may see his reward; for, though we may sometimes use such slaves for the deep causes of state necessity, we would not encourage their growth. Away with him!"

Jodelle struggled to speak, but his tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of his mouth; and before he could force his throat to utterance, a bustle at the other end of the long hall called the attention of every one but himself.

"Sir King! Sir King! hear me, for mercy's sake!" cried the Brabançois, as he was dragged away. But John heeded him not, fixing his eyes upon the figure of the Earl of Salisbury, who, armed at all points except the head, and covered with dust, pushed through the crowd of attendants at the extremity of the apartment, followed by two or three other persons, as dusty and travel-stained as himself. His cheek was flushed, his brow was bent and frowning, and, without a show even of reverence or ceremony, he strode up the centre of the hall, mounted the steps of the throne, and standing beside the King's chair, bent down his head, addressing John in a low and seemingly angry whisper.

His coming, and the bold and irreverent manner in which he approached the King, seemed to destroy at once the ceremony of the court. The heart of almost every noble present was swelling with indignation at the assassination of the unhappy Arthur, then already public, and by most persons said to have been committed by the King's own hand; and now, encouraged by the bold anger evident on the brow of John's natural brother, they broke the circle they had formed, and, in a close group, spoke together eagerly: while William Longsword continued to pour upon the bloodthirsty tyrant on the throne a torrent of stern reproaches, the more cutting and bitter from the undertone in which he was obliged to speak them.

For the reproaches John little cared; but his eye glanced terrified to the disturbed crowd of his nobles. He knew himself detested by every one present: no one, but one or two of his servile sycophants, was attached to him by any one tie on which he could depend. He knew what sudden and powerful resolutions are often taken in such moments of excitement; and, as he marked the quick and eager whisper, the flashing eyes, and frowning brows of his angry barons, he felt the crown tremble on his head. It was in the kindly feeling and generous heart of his bastard brother alone that he had any confidence; and grasping the Earl's hand, without replying to his accusation, he pointed to the group beside them, and cutting across the other's whisper, said in a low voice, "See, see, they revolt! William, will you too abandon me?"

The Earl glanced his eyes towards them, and instantly comprehended the King's fears. "No," said he, in a louder voice than he had hitherto spoke. "No! I will not abandon you, because you are my father's son, and the last of his direct race; but you are a——." The Earl bent his lips to John's ear, and whispered the epithet in a tone that confined it to him to whom it was addressed. That it was not a very gentle one seemed plain from the manner in which it was given and which it was received; but the Earl then descended the steps of the throne, and passing into the midst of the peers, grasped Lord Pembroke and several others, one after the other, by the hand.

"Pembroke!" said he, "Arundel! I pray you to be calm. 'Tis a bad business this, and must be inquired into at another time, when our minds are more cool, to take counsel upon it. But be calm now, I pray you all, for my sake."

"For your sake!" said the Earl of Pembroke, with a smile. "By Heavens! Salisbury, we were just saying, that the best king that ever sat on the English throne was a bastard; and we see not why another should not sit there now. Why should not Rosamond of Woodstock produce as good a son as the mother of William the Conqueror?"

"Hush! hush!" cried Salisbury, quickly, at the pointed allusion to himself. "Not a word of that, my friends. I would not wrong my father's son for all the crowns of Europe. Nor am I fit for a king; but no more of that! Form round again, I pray you; for I have a duty to perform as a knight, and would fain do it decently, though my blood was up with what I heard on my arrival."

The barons again, with lowering brows and eyes bent sternly on the ground, as if scarce yet resolved in regard to their conduct, formed somewhat of a regular sweep round the throne, while Lord Salisbury advanced, and once more addressed the weak and cruel monarch, who sat upon his throne, the most abject thing that earth can ever produce—a despised and detested King.

"My lord," said William Longsword, almost moved to pity by the sunk and dejected air that now overclouded the changeable brow of the light sovereign, "when we parted in Touraine, I yielded to your importunity my noble prisoner, Sir Guy de Coucy, on the promise that you would cherish and honour him, and on the pretence that you wished to win him and attach him to your own person; reserving to myself, however, the right of putting him at what ransom I pleased, and demanding his liberty when that ransom should be paid. How much truth there was in the pretence by which you won him from me, and how well you have kept the promise you made, you yourself well know; but, on my honour, to do away the stain that you have brought upon me, I would willingly free the good knight without any ransom whatever, only that he himself would consider such a proposal as an insult to a warrior of his high fame and bearing. However that may be, I have fixed his ransom at seven thousand crowns of gold; and here stands his page ready to pay the same, the moment that his lord is free. I therefore claim him at your hands; for, though I hear he is in that fatal Tower, whose very name shall live a reproach upon England's honour for ever, I do not think that the man lives who would dare to practise against the life of *my* prisoner."

"My Lord of Salisbury," replied John, raising his head, and striving to assume the air of dignity which he could sometimes command; but as he did so, his eyes encountered the stern bold look of William Longsword, and the fixed, indignant glances of his dissatisfied nobles; and he changed his purpose in the very midst, finding that dissimulation, his usual resource, was now become a necessary one. "My Lord of Salisbury," he repeated, softening his tone, "thou art our brother, and should at least judge less harshly of us than those who know us less. A villain, construing our commands by his own black heart, has committed within the walls of this town a most foul and sacrilegious deed, and many wilful and traitorous persons seek to impute that deed to us. Now, though it becomes us not, as a King, to notice the murmurs of every fool that speaks without judgment, to you, fair brother, and to any of our well-beloved nobles of England, we will condescend willingly to prove that our commands were the most opposite. This we will fully show you, on a more private occasion."

As John spoke, and found himself listened to, he became more bold, and proceeded. "In regard to our own time, during that unhappy day which deprived us of our dear nephew, we could, were we put to such unkingly inquisition, account for every moment of our time. The greater part—nay, I might almost say the whole—was spent in reading despatches from Rome and Germany, with my Lords of Arundel and Bagot."

"Except two hours in the morning, my lord, and from six till nine at night, when I returned and found you wondrous pale and agitated," replied Lord Bagot, with a meaning look.

"Our excellent friend, and very good knight, William de la Roche Guyon, was with us at both the times you speak of," said the King, turning towards the young Provençal, who stood near him, with a gracious and satisfied air. "Was it not so, fair sir?"

"It was, my lord," faltered William de la Roche Guyon; "but——" All the barons, at the sound of that *but*, fixed their eyes upon him, as if the secret was about to transpire; but John took up the sentence as he hesitated to conclude it.

"But,—you would say," proceeded the King,—"you went with me to the Tower, where the poor child was confined, in the morning. True, you did,—'Tis true, my lords. But did you not hear me severely reproach the captain of the Tower for placing the Sire de Coucy and the Duke of Brittany in one small apartment, to the injury of the health of both?—and did I not dismiss him for not lodging them better? Then again, after vespers, did you ever see me quit the palace? Speak, I charge you!" and he fixed his eye sternly on the effeminate face of the young knight.

Guillaume de la Roche Guyon turned somewhat pale, but confirmed the King's statement; and John went on, gathering confidence and daring as he proceeded. "This is enough for the present moment," said he: "we will more of it hereafter; but when our exculpation shall be complete, woe to him who shall dare to whisper one traitorous word upon this score! In regard to your prisoner, my Lord of Salisbury, before putting him at liberty, we would fain——"

"Nothing before putting him at liberty, my lord," said the Earl, in a stern voice. "The prisoner is mine; I have agreed upon his ransom. Here stands his page ready to pay the sum, and, moreover, whatever charges may be incurred in his imprisonment: and I demand that he be delivered to me this instant."

"Well, well, fair brother," answered John, "be it as thou wilt. I will despatch the order after dinner."

"Haw! haw!" cried somebody from the bottom of the hall, "haw! haw! and perhaps De Coucy may be despatched before dinner."

"By my knighthood, the fool says true," cried the blunt Earl.—"My lord, as we have too fatal a proof that mistakes in commands lead to evil effects within the walls of a prison, by your leave, we will liberate this good knight without farther delay. I will go myself and see it done."

"At least," said the King, "to keep up the seeming of a respect that you appear little inclined to pay in reality, Earl of Salisbury, take a royal order for his release.—Clerk, let one be drawn."

The clerk drew the order, and John read it over with a degree of wilful slowness that excited not a little Lord Salisbury's suspicions. At length, however, the King concluded; and, having signed it, he gave it to the Earl, saying, "There, deliver him yourself if you will—and God send he may have eaten his dinner!" muttered the King to himself, as William Longsword took the paper, and turned with hasty steps to give it effect. "William!—William of Salisbury!" cried John, before the other had traversed half the hall. "Which is the page? Shall he count out the ransom while you are gone?"

"That is the page," said the Earl, turning unwillingly, and pointing to Ermold de Marcy, who, accompanied by a herald and Gallon the fool, with two men-at-arms, bearing bags of money, stood at the further end of the hall, in which the strange and painful scene we have endeavoured to describe had taken place. "That is the page. Let him tell down the ransom if you will. I will be back directly; 'tis but ten paces to the Tower.—That is the page," he repeated, as he saw John about to add some new question.

"And the gentleman with the nose?" demanded the light monarch, unable, under any circumstances, to restrain his levity. "And the gentleman with the nose—the snout!—the proboscis!—If you love me, tell me who is he?"

But Salisbury was gone; and Gallon, as usual, took upon him to answer for himself—"Bless your mightiness," cried he, "I am twin brother of John, King of England. Nature cast our two heads out of the same batch of clay; she made him more knave than fool, and me more fool than knave; and verily, because she gave him a crown to his head, and me none, she furnished me forthwith an ell of nose to make up for it."

"Thou art a smart fool, whatever thou art," replied John, glad to fill up the time, during which he was obliged to endure the presence of his barons, and the uncertainty of what the order he had given for De Coucy's liberation might produce. "Come hither, fool; and you, sir page, tell down the money, to the secretary. And now, fool, wilt thou take service with me? Wouldst thou rather serve a king, or a simple knight?"

"Haw! haw!" shouted Gallon, reeling with laughter, as if there was something perfectly ridiculous in the proposition.—"Haw! haw! haw! I am fool enough, 'tis true! But I am not fool enough to serve a king."

"And why not?" demanded John. "Methinks there is no great folly in that. Why not, fellow?"

"Haw, haw!" cried Gallon again. "A king's smiles are too valuable for me. That is the coin they pay in, where other men pay in gold. Besides, since the time of Noe downwards, kings have always been ungrateful to their best subjects."

"How so?" asked the King. "In faith I knew not that the patriarch had ever such a beast as thee in the ark."

"Was not the dove the first that he turned out?" demanded Gallon, with a look of mock simplicity, that called a smile upon even the stern faces of the English barons.

"Ha!" said John, "thinkest thou thyself a dove? Thou art like it in the face, truly!"

"Not less than thou art like a lion," answered Gallon, boldly. "And yet men say you had once such a relation.—Haw, haw! Haw, haw, haw!" and he sprang back a step, as if he expected John to strike him.

But for a moment, leaving the conversation, which John for many reasons continued to carry on with the juggler, though his replies were of a more stinging quality than the monarch greatly relished, we must follow Lord Salisbury to the prison of De Coucy.

It was a little past that early hour at which men dined in those days; and when the Earl entered the gloomy vault that contained the young knight, he found him seated by a table groaning under a repast not very usual on the boards of a prison.

De Coucy, however, was not eating, nor had he eaten, though the viands before him might well have tempted lips which had tasted little but bread and water for many months before.

"Salisbury!" exclaimed the knight, as the Earl strode into the chamber, with haste in his aspect, and symptoms of long travel in every part of his dress—"Salisbury! have you come at length?"

"Hush! hush! De Coucy!" cried the Earl, grasping his hand. "Do not condemn me, without having heard. John persuaded me that he wished to win you to his cause; and promised most solemnly that he would not only treat you as a friend, but as a favourite. I am not the only one he has deceived. However, till a fortnight since, I thought he had carried you to England, as he declared he would. Your page, with wonderful perseverance, traced me out amidst all the troubles in Touraine, and offered your instant ransom. I sent to England to find you—my messenger returned with tidings that you were here; and, doubting false play, I set off without delay to release you. At every town of Normandy I heard worse and worse accounts of my bad brother's conduct.—Thank God, I am a bastard!—and when I come here, I learn that that luckless boy, Arthur, is gone, God knows where, or how!"

"I will tell you where you may find him, Salisbury," said De Coucy, grasping the Earl's arm, and fixing his eyes steadily on his face: "at the bottom of the Seine. Do you mark me? At the bottom of the Seine!"

"I guessed it," replied the Earl, shutting his teeth, and looking up to heaven, as if for patience.—"I guessed it!—Know you who did it?—they say you were confined together."

"Do I know who did it?" exclaimed De Coucy: "John of Anjou! your brother! his uncle!"

"Not with his own hand surely," exclaimed Salisbury, drawing back with a movement of horror.

"As I hope for salvation in the blessed cross!" replied De Coucy, "I believe he did it with his own hand. At least, full certainly, 'twas beneath his own eye;" and he proceeded to detail all that he had heard. "Before that day," continued the knight, "I was fed on bread and water, or what was little better. Since—you see how they treat me;" and he pointed to the table. "I have contented myself each morning with half of one of those white loaves," he added: "first, because this is no place for hunger; and next, because I would rather not die like a rat poisoned in a granary."

The Earl hung his head for a moment or two in silence; and then, again grasping De Coucy's hand, he said, "Come, good knight, come! Deeds done cannot be amended. They are tumbled, like old furniture, into the great lumber-house of the past, to give place to newer things, some better and some worse. You were a prisoner but now.—You are now free; and believe me, on my honour, I would rather have laid my sword-hand upon a block, beneath an axeman's blow, than that my noble friend should have undergone such usage:—but come, your ransom by this time is told down, and your attendants wait you in the palace hall. First, however, you shall go to my lodging in Rouen, and do on my best hauberk and arms. There are horses in my stables, which have stood there unridden for months. Take your choice of them; and God speed you! for, though it be no hospitable wish, I long to see your back turned on Normandy."

De Coucy willingly accepted the Earl's courtesy, and followed down the stairs of the prison into the open air. He trod with the proud step of a freeman: the sight of living nature was delight; the fresh breath of heaven a blessing indeed; and when he stood once more clothed in shining arms, he felt as if the bold spirit of his youngest days had come back with redoubled force.

As they proceeded to traverse the space which separated the lodging of the Earl of Salisbury from the ducal palace, William Longsword proceeded to give De Coucy a short account of all the steps which his page had taken to effect his liberation, and which, however brief, we shall not repeat here; it being quite sufficient to the purposes of this history, that the knight was liberated.

Salisbury and De Coucy mounted the stairs of the palace with a rapid pace; but, at the hall door, they paused for a single moment: "Salisbury!" said De Coucy, with a meaning tone, "I must do my duty as a knight."

"Do it!" replied the Earl, with firm sadness, understanding at once the young knight's meaning. "Do it, De Coucy—God forbid that I should stay a true knight from doing his devoir!"

So saying, he led the way into the hall.

John was still jesting with Gallon the fool. The barons were standing around, some silently listening to the colloquy of the King and the juggler, some speaking together in a low voice. At a table, on one side of the hall, where sat the secretary, appeared De Coucy's page, Ernold de Marcy, with a herald; and on the board between him and the clerk, lay a large pile of gold pieces, with the leathern bags which had disgorged them, while one of the men behind held a similar pouch, ready to dispose of its contents as need might be.

De Coucy advanced to the table, and welcomed his page with an approving smile, while the herald cried in a loud voice, to call attention: "Oyez, oyez! Hear, hear!" and then tendering the ransom in set form, demanded the liberation of Sir Guy de Coucy. The ransom was accepted with the usual ceremonies, and a safe conduct granted to the knight through the territories of the King of England; which being done, De Coucy advanced from the table up the centre of the hall.

What had before passed had taken place at such a distance from the throne, that John found it no difficult matter to keep his eyes in another direction, though he was now speaking with William de la Roche Guyon, as Gallon the fool had left him on his lord's entrance, and was standing by the table, his nose at the same time wriggling with most portentous agitation, as he saw the gold delivered by the page, and taken up by the secretary. The monarch had thus affected scarcely to see the young knight; but now De Coucy advanced, with slow, marked steps, directly towards him, accompanied pace by pace by the herald, who, with that sort of instinctive knowledge of every chivalrous feeling which the officers of arms in that day are said to have possessed, made a quick movement forward as they neared the throne, though without any command to that effect; and exclaimed in a loud tone,—"Hear! John, King of England! hear!"

John looked up, and turned a frowning brow upon De Coucy. But the knight was not to be daunted by fierce looks, even from a king; and he proceeded boldly and in a slow distinct voice. "John of Anjou!" he said, "false traitor, and assassin! I, Guy de Coucy, knight, do accuse you here in your palace, and on your throne, of the murder of your nephew, Arthur Plantagenet, rightful King of England; and to your beard I call you mansworn, traitor, murderer, and felon—false knight, discourteous gentleman, and treacherous king! Moreover, whoever does deny the murder of which I here accuse you, I give him the lie, and will prove it, my hand against his, according to the law of arms."

There was an awful pause. "Have I so many barons and noble knights around me," cried John, at length, "and not one of them noble and brave enough to repel the insults offered to their King, in their presence, by this braggart Frenchman?"

Several of the circle stepped forward, and De Coucy cast down his glove, for him to take it that chose; but Lord Pembroke waved his hand, exclaiming, "Hold, lords and knights! hold! We must not make ourselves champions of a bad cause. Such is not the courage of true knights. My lord the King! the nobles of England have ever been found too willing to cast away their lives and fortunes in their monarch's defence; and there is not one man in this presence that, give him a good cause, and he would not meet in arms the best Frenchman that ever was born. When, therefore, my lord, you shall satisfactorily have proved that this charge against you is false, the swords of a thousand British knights will start from their sheaths to avenge your quarrel; and I, as your lord marshal, claim to be the first."

"With all respect, my Lord de Coucy," he added, while John bit his lip with bursting mortification, "I raise your glove, and pledge myself to meet you in arms within three months, if I find cause to judge your words bold and untrue. If not, I will either yield the gage to whatever true knight can, on his conscience, meet you, or will render it back unto you honourably, in default of such. I am right willing ever to do battle with a brave man; but I could never fight, with the ghost of Arthur Plantagenet crying that my cause was evil."

So saying, he raised the glove, and De Coucy, darting a glance of bitter scorn at John, bowed his head to Lord Pembroke, and proceeded down the hall to the place where he had left William Longsword. The Earl, however, had not stayed to hear the accusation that he knew was about to be launched at his brother, and which, as he could not refute, he dared not resent.

De Coucy found him on the steps of the palace, at the bottom of which stood a fresh horse, prepared for himself, together with the beasts of Ermold the page, the herald, Gallon the fool, and the two men-at-arms, who had carried the money to pay the knight's ransom. To these were added the escort of a body of horse archers, to guard the young knight safe through the English territory. This, however, he declined; and, grasping the hand of the Earl of Salisbury, between whose bosom and his own existed that mutual esteem which all noble minds feel towards each other, he sprang upon his horse, and galloped with all speed out of Rouen.

CHAPTER XXXV.

The road that De Coucy followed had been made, apparently, without the least purpose of proceeding straight to Paris, though it ultimately terminated there; but its object seemed more particularly to visit every possible place on the way, without leaving the smallest village within several miles of the direct line to complain of being neglected. Thus, instead of cutting off angles, and such other whimsical improvements of modern days, it proceeded along the banks of the river, following, with a laudable pertinacity, all the turnings and windings thereof.

This sort of road, which uncommonly resembles the way in which I have been obliged to relate this most meandering of histories, is doubtless very agreeable when you have plenty of time to stay and amuse yourself with the pleasures of this prospect or that—to get off your horse to gather a flower upon the bank—to pause under the shadow of a tree, and pant in concert with your beast in the cool air; but when you are in a hurry, then is the time to bless modern short cuts. Such must be my case; for, having a long way before me, and a short space to do it in, I must abridge De Coucy's journey as much as possible; and, only staying to relate two events which occurred to him on the road, must hasten to bring him, together with many other characters, to that one point to which all their histories are tending.

Passing over, then, the follies of Gallon the fool, who, notwithstanding all his maniac malice, felt he knew not what of joy at his lord's deliverance, and all the details given by Ermold de Marcy concerning his various peregrinations and negotiations, together with the young knight's joyful feelings on his liberation, and his sorrowful ones at the accounts he heard of the unhappy Count d'Auvergne, we will bring the whole party at once to that high hill from which the lower road to Paris descends rapidly on the little, dirty, old-fashioned town called the *Pont de l'Arche.*

There being few things more uncertain in the world than the smiles of beauty and the boundaries of kingdoms, the limits of France, which have been here, and there, and every where, within the last few centuries, were fixed, on the precise day I speak of, at the Pont de l'Arche. That hill being then the extreme limit of King John's Norman dominions, his deputy prévôt, John of Wincaunton, was, at the very moment De Coucy and his followers arrived at the summit of the hill, engaged in the very praiseworthy occupation of hanging the Brabançois, Jodelle, to one of the highest elms in the land.

It must not, however, be inferred that the hanging had actually commenced; for though the prévôt, with a party of six or seven men, very well calculated to hang their neighbours, stood round Jodelle under the tree, while one of their companions fastened the end of a thick noose tightly to one of the strongest branches, yet the plunderer's neck was still free from that encumbrance so fatal to persons of his profession.

There are various sorts of bravery; and Jodelle was a brave man, of a certain sort. He had never shown himself afraid of death; and yet, the idea of hanging affected him with mortal fear—whether he fancied that that peculiar position would be unpleasant to him or not, can hardly be said; but certain it is, though he had never shrunk from death in the battle-field, his face looked already that of a corpse; his limbs shook, and his teeth chattered, at the sight of the awful preparations that were carrying on around him.

What is there to which hope will not attach itself? Even the sight of De Coucy, whom he had sold to his enemies, awoke a dream of it in the breast of the Brabançois, and with pitiful cries he adjured the knight to save him from the hands of his executioners.

The men of the prévôt stood to their arms; but the knight's reply soon showed them they had no molestation to fear from him. "Villain," answered he, "if I saved thee from their hands, it should be but to impale thee alive! Every drop of Prince Arthur's blood cries vengeance upon thee! and, by Heaven! I have a mind to stay and see thee hanged myself!"

"Haw, haw!" cried Gallon the fool,—"Haw, haw! Beau sire Jodelle! It strikes me, they are going to hang thee, beau sire! Undo the haussecol of thy doublet, man. They are going to give thee one of tighter stuff. Haw, haw! Sire Brabançois! Haw, haw! Why pray you not the Coucy again? Perchance he may be moved. Or, rather, why pray you not me? I am the only man in the troop that can aid thee.—Haw, haw, haw! haw, haw! I could save thee if I would!"

"Thou wouldst not if thou couldst, fiend!" replied Jodelle, glaring on him with eyes in which wrath struggled with terror, for his executioners were now actually adjusting the noose to his neck, and his pinioned hands might be seen to quiver with the agonizing anticipation of destruction. "I do now believe thee a devil indeed, as thou once toldest me, for none but the devil could mock me in such a moment as this."

"Haw, haw, haw! Haw, haw, haw!" roared Gallon, rolling on his horse with laughter. "Dost thou believe? Well, then, for that I will save thee;" and, riding up to the prévôt, the juggler thrust his snout into that officer's ear, and whispered a few words, in regard to the truth of which the other seemed at first doubtful. Gallon, however, exclaimed, "'Tis true, thou infidel! 'tis true! I heard the order given myself! Look ye there!—There comes the messenger down in the valley—Haw, haw, haw! Ye fools! Thought you King John could spare so useful a villain as that?"

The prévôt gazed in the direction wherein the juggler pointed; and then made a sign to his men to put a stop to the preparations, which they were hurrying forward with most unseemly haste; while Gallon, with a patronizing sort of nod to Jodelle, and a loud laugh, rode on after De Coucy, who had not waited to listen to the termination of the eloquent conversation between the juggler and the coterel. At the bottom of the hill, however, the young knight turned his head, never doubting that he should behold the form of his late follower dangling from the elm; but, to his surprise, he perceived two of the men placing Jodelle on horseback, still apparently bound, and the rest hastening to mount their own beasts, while a horseman was seen conversing with the prévôt.

"By St. Paul! if thou hast saved that fellow from the hands of the hangman," cried De Coucy, "thou art a juggler indeed, and a mischievous one to boot, friend Gallon!"

"'Twas not I saved him, friend Coucy," replied Gallon, who was in somewhat of a saner state of mind than usual. "'Twas our very good friend and patron, John, King of England; and I'll tell thee what, Coucy, if you ill-treat me, and thump me, as you used sometimes to do, I'll e'en take service with him, John of Anjou, and leave you! Haw, haw! What do you think of that? Or else I'll go and live with fair William de la Roche Guyon," he added, in his rambling way. "He loves me dearly, does William de la Roche Guyon. So I'll go and live with him, when I want to better myself. Haw, haw! Then I shall always be near the pretty Lady Isadore of the Mount, whom good King John of England gave to fair Count William this morning, for standing by him in his need, as he said. 'Twas all in a whisper; but I would have heard it had it been twice a whisper; my ears are as fine as my nose. Haw, haw!"

De Coucy had drawn his rein at the first word of these very pleasing tidings, which Gallon communicated with a broad lack-lustre stare, from which he had banished every particle of speculation; so that, whether it was true or false, a dreadful reality or an idiotic jest, was in no degree to be gathered from his countenance.

"What is that you say?" cried the knight. "Tell me, good Gallon, for the love of heaven, are you serious in your news?"

"Good Gallon!—Haw! haw!" shouted the jongleur,—"Good Gallon! He'll call me pretty Gallon next! — Haw, haw, haw! Coucy, you are mad!"

"For God's sake!" cried the knight, earnestly, "do not drive me mad really; but, for once, try to give me a connected answer. Say! What was it you heard that traitorous King say to the beardless, womanly coward, William de la Roche Guyon?"

"Give you a connected answer!" replied Gallon, suddenly assuming an unwonted gravity. "Why should you doubt my giving you one? I'm not mad, Coucy! I'll tell you what the King said, as wisely as he that spoke it. William de la Roche, whispered he, with the face of a cat lapping a saucer full of cream—William de la Roche, you have stood by me this day in my need, and I will not forget it."

And Gallon, though with a countenance as unlike that of John of Anjou as any human face could well be, contrived to imitate the King's look and manner, so as to leave no earthly doubt, not only that he had said what the fool attributed to him, but that he had also precisely said it as was represented.

"Well, then," continued the jongleur, "the noble King bade him, fair William de Roche as aforesaid, take the fair Lady Isadore from the castle of Moulineaux, hard by Rouen, where her father, Count Julian the Wise, had left her under the care of the Lady Plumdumpling, or some such English name; and when he had got her, to carry her whither he would, as quick as possible. And the sweet potentate John, with true kingly consideration for the happiness of his lieges, added this sage counsel to the aforesaid William, namely, that if he liked, he might marry the maid; but if he liked light love better than broad lands, he might make his leman of her."

"By the Lord, fool! if thou deceivest me, thou shalt rue it!" cried De Coucy. "I believe not thy tale! How came her father to trust her from his sight?"

"I fear me, my lord, Gallon is right," said Ermold de Marcy, whose various negotiations had somewhat rubbed off the rawness of his youth, and had given him confidence to address his master more boldly. "In my wanderings about, striving to achieve your ransom, I have heard much of Count Julian and his proceedings; and I thus learned, that not long after your capture, he left the court of King John, to raise all his vassals for the great alliance that, men say, is forming against King Philip, leaving the Lady Isadore as a hostage for his faith, with the Lady Plymlymman of Cornouaille, chatelaine of the castle of Moulineaux. So that Gallon's tale is too likely to be true."

While the page spoke, the juggler drew his two eyes together upon De Coucy's countenance, watching, with a fiendish sort of pleasure, the workings of all those powerful feelings that the news he had given had cast into commotion. At length, he burst into a loud laugh. "Haw, haw!" cried he. "Haw, haw, haw! De Coucy's in a rage!—Now, Coucy, now, think of the very best way of cleaving me down Guillaume de la Roche from the crest to the saddle. Haw, haw, haw! Oh, rare! Crack his skull like a walnut-shell, and leave him no more brains than a datestone. Haw, haw! haw, haw!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

There was a party of travellers wound down through the beautiful valleys, and over the rich hills that lie between Pacy and Rolleboise, proceeding slowly and calmly, though with a certain degree of circumspection, as if they were not at all without their share of the apprehensions to which travellers of every kind were exposed in those days, and yet were embarrassed by the presence of some one, whose sex or age prevented them from proceeding more rapidly.

At the head of the cavalcade were seen, agitated by the breeze, various of those light habiliments which have been used in all ages to give the female figure a degree of butterfly flutter, which seems to court pursuit; and it appeared out of consideration for the frailer limbs of the part of the troop thus clothed, that the iron-clad warriors which formed the main body proceeded at so slow and easy a pace.

The whole party might consist of fifty persons,' five or six of whom, by their pennons and arms, were distinguished as knights; while the rest showed but the sword and buckler of the squire, or the archer's quiver, long bow, and round target. Except an *éclaireur* thrown out before to mark the way, the female part of the troop took the lead; and, as far as could be judged from appearance, the rest was but an escort attending upon them.

One of the knights, however, whose helmet nodded with plumes, and whose arms were glittering with gold, ever and anon spurred forward, and, with bending head and low musical voice, addressed a few words to the fair girl who headed the troop, demanding now whether she was fatigued, now whether she felt the cold, now promising speedy repose, and now offering a few words of somewhat commonplace gallantry, concerning bright eyes, rosy lips, and inspiring smiles.

To his questions concerning her comfort, the lady replied briefly, and as coldly as courtesy permitted; and to his gallant speeches, the chilling unmoved glance of her large dark eye might have afforded sufficient answer, had he been one easily rebuffed. The only uncalled-for words which she addressed to him herself tended but to ask where it was that her father had appointed to meet her; and on his replying that a place called Drocourt had been named, some five leagues farther, she relapsed into silence.

The young knight, however, though on every check he received he sunk back into himself with an air of deep despondency, still returned to his point, holding perseverance to be the most serviceable quality in the world in all dealings with the fair; and thus, from time to time, he continued his assiduities, notwithstanding cold looks and scanty answers; till at length the road, descending, began to wind along the banks of the Seine.

Here his attention became more entirely directed to precautions against surprise; and the increased haste and circumspection which he enjoined, seemed to imply that he found himself upon hostile and dangerous ground.

"See you no ferry boat," cried he, "along the river? — Look out, Arnoul!—look out! We must get across as soon as may be."

"The ferry lies beyond this woody tongue of land, my lord," replied the man. "'Tis not half a mile hence, and there is no town between; so we may pass easily." And, spurring on, the party entered the pass, between the wood which skirted down from the road to the river on the one side, and the high chalky cliffs on the other.

The knight in the gilded armour had received a fresh rebuff from the lady whose favour he seemed so anxious to win; and, having retired to his companions, who, as we have shown, were a few steps behind, was conversing with them in an earnest but under-tone, when from an ambush in the wood, which had escaped even the eyes of the advanced scout, rushed forth a body of horsemen, with such rapid force as to separate entirely the female part of the cavalcade from their escort.

It was done in an instant; but, in truth, it needed such rapidity of attack to render it, in itself, anything short of madness; for, when the escort recovered in a degree from their first astonishment, they found that seven men formed the whole force that had thrown them into such confusion. Before, however, this became apparent, the leader of their adversaries shouting, "A Coucy! A Coucy!" spurred like lightning upon the knight we have before mentioned, and at one blow of his battle-axe dashed him under his horse's feet. A squire behind shared the same fate; a man-at-arms followed; and each of De Coucy's followers fighting as if inspired by the same daring valour that animated their lord, the escort were driven back along the road, leaving four or five saddles vacant. Then, however, the tide of battle turned. The knights at the head of the escort saw the handful of men to which they were opposed, and, ashamed of yielding a step to so scanty a body, four of them united their efforts to attack De Coucy, while another rallied their followers; and the young knight was in turn driven back, now striking at one, now at another, now parrying the blows that were aimed at himself, and now showering them thick upon the head of the opponent that he had singled out for the moment.

Separated from the escort which attended her, the lady we have mentioned, with her women, had in the meanwhile endeavoured to escape from the scene of strife which had so suddenly arisen, by hurrying on upon the road; but the scout, who had turned at the first noise of the affray, caught her bridle, and, notwithstanding her prayers and entreaties, would not suffer her to proceed.

The danger, indeed, to which she was exposed was not for the moment great, as, by this time, the first impetuous attack of De Coucy and his followers had driven the escort back beyond the turn of the wood; and nothing could be gathered of the progress of the fight but from the trampling of the horses heard sounding this way or that, and the cries and shouts of the combatants approaching or receding as the battle turned.

"Lady Isadore! Lady Isadore!" cried a girl who followed her. "It is the Sire de Coucy. Hear you not his battle-cry? and I am sure I saw Ermold, the page, strike down an archer twice as big as himself. God send them the victory!"

"Hush! foolish girl! hush!" cried Isadore of the Mount, leaning her head to listen more intently. "Hark, they are coming this way! Free my bridle, soldier! Free my bridle, for the love of Heaven! How dare you, serf, to hold me against my will? You will repent, whoever wins!"

The soldier, however, heeded neither the lady's entreaties nor her threats, though it so happened that it would have proved fortunate to himself had he done so; for, in a moment after, De Coucy, driven back by the superior force to which he was opposed, appeared at the turn of the wood, striking a thundering blow on the crest of one of those who pressed closely on him, while the three others spurred after at about three horse-lengths' distance.

No sooner had the blow descended, than the knight's quick glance fell upon Isadore. "Fly, Isadore—fly!" cried he. "You have been deceived into the power of traitors!—Fly! up the path to the right! To the castle on the hill!" But, as he spoke he suddenly perceived the soldier holding her rein, and forcing her horse up a bank somewhat out of the current of the fight. Like lightning, De Coucy wheeled his charger; and, disappointing, by the turn he took, a blow that one of his adversaries was discharging at his head, he swung his battle-axe round in the air, and hurled it with sure and unerring aim at the unhappy scout. It needed a firm heart and well-practised hand to dismiss such a fatal missile in a direction so near the person of one deeply beloved.

But De Coucy had both; and rushing within two feet of Isadore of the Mount, the head of the ponderous axe struck the soldier full on the neck and jawbone, and dashed him from his horse, a ghastly and disfigured corpse.

"Fly, Isadore! fly!" repeated De Coucy, at the same moment drawing his sword, and spurring his charger furiously against the first of his opponents. "Fly up to the right! The castle on the hill!—the castle on the hill!"

Isadore required no second injunction, but parted like an arrow from the scene of the battle, while De Coucy made almost more than mortal efforts to drive back the enemy.

Though he thus gave her time to escape, his valour and skill were of course in vain, opposed to numbers not inferior to himself in personal courage, and clothed in arms equal to those by which he was defended. All he could do was to give his scattered followers time again to collect about him; and then, satisfied with having delivered Isadore, to keep up a defensive fight along the road.

Even this, however, was difficult to conduct successfully in the face of a body of men, so much superior to his own in numbers, eager to avenge themselves upon him, and hurried on by the knowledge, that, being upon adverse ground, they must win their revenge quickly, or not at all. The four knights pressed on him on all sides, striving to bear him down to the earth; his armour was hacked and shivered in many parts; his shield was nearly cleft in two with the blow of a battle-axe; several of the bars of his visor were dashed to pieces, so as to leave his face nearly uncovered; but still he retreated slowly, with his face to his enemies, shouting from time to time his battle-cry, to cheer the spirits of his men, and striking terrible sweeping blows with his long sword, whenever his opponents made a general rush upon him.

One of these united attacks, however, had nearly proved fatal to the gallant young knight; for, in suddenly backing his horse, to avoid it, the animal's feet struck against a felled tree, and he went down at once upon his haunches. "A Coucy! a Coucy!" cried the knight, striving to spur him up; but all four of his antagonists pressed upon him at once, beating him down with repeated blows, when suddenly two new combatants were added to the fight, Philip Augustus and the Count d'Auvergne.

Both, though we have seen them in a preceding chapter opposed hand to hand, suddenly ceased their mutual conflict, and rushed forward to strike upon the side of De Coucy. The Count d'Auvergne, warned by his friend's well-known battle-cry, rushed, bare-headed as he was, into the midst of the struggle, and, striking with all the energy of insanity, dashed at once the foremost of the young knight's opponents to the earth. The King, recognising instantly, by the Norman fashion of their harness, the followers of his enemy King John, sprang on his horse ; and, with the same chivalrous spirit which had induced him in former days to attack King Richard's whole army near Courcelles with scarce two hundred knights in his own train, he cast himself in the foremost of the battle, and plied his weapon with a hand that seldom struck in vain.

The struggle, by its greater equality, now became more desperate ; but it was soon rendered no longer doubtful, by the sight of a body of horse coming down at full speed on the road from the castle. The Normans who had followed Guillaume de la Roche Guyon, now hastened to effect their retreat, well knowing that whatever fresh troops arrived on the spot must necessarily swell the party of their adversaries. They made an effort, however, in the first place, to deliver their companion who had been struck down by the Count d'Auvergne ; but finding it impossible, they turned their horses, and retreated along the line of road over which they had advanced, only pausing for an instant at the spot where the contest had first begun, to aid William de la Roche himself, who had, as we have shown, been cast from his horse by a blow of De Coucy's battle-axe ; and now sat by the road-side, somewhat stunned and dizzied by his fall, and completely plundered of his fine armour.

"Haw ! haw !" shouted some one from the top of one of the leafless trees hard by, as they remounted the discomfited cavalier. "Haw ! haw ! haw !" and in a moment, Gallon the fool cast down one of the gay gauntlets on the head of its former owner, laughing till the whole cliffs rang, to see it strike him on the forehead, and deluge his fair effeminate face with blood. The Normans had not time to seek vengeance ; for De Coucy's party, reinforced by the troop from the castle, hung upon their rear, and gave them neither pause nor respite, till the early night, following a day in February, closed upon the world ; and, fatigued with so long a strife, the pursuers drew the rein, and left them to escape as they might.

Though on foot, the Count d'Auvergne had kept up with the horsemen; but so fierce and eager had been the pursuit, that scarce a word had passed between De Coucy's party and their new companions, till, by common accord, they halted.

It was then that the two brothers in arms turned towards each other, each suddenly grasping his friend's hand with all the warmth of old affection. "D'Auvergne!" cried De Coucy, gazing on his friend's face, down which the blood was streaming from a wound in his temple, giving to his worn and ashy countenance, in the twilight of the evening, an appearance of scarcely human paleness.

"De Coucy!" replied D'Auvergne, fixing his eyes on the broken bars of the young knight's helmet. "De Coucy!" he repeated; and, turning away his head with a look of painful consciousness, he carried his hand to his brow, as if sensible of his infirmity, adding, "I have been ill, my friend—the hot sun of the desert, and Agnes' cold words when I delivered her father's message—a message I had sworn on my knighthood to deliver——"

"Ha! Then it was not"—cried Philip, eagerly: "but let us return to some place of repose!" added he, remembering his disguise, and cutting across a topic which, besides being painful to himself, he loved not to hear canvassed near the ears of strangers. "Let us return to some place of repose. We have to thank you, Sir Knight," he added, turning to the leader of the horsemen who had joined them from the castle—"we have to thank you for your timely aid."

"Not so, beau sire," replied the knight, bowing to his saddle-bow. "We were warned of the strife by a lady, who claimed refuge in the castle; and we instantly came down to strike for France."

"You did well!" replied the King. "Hark you, sir knight;" and approaching his horse, he spoke for some moments to him in an under-voice, to which the only reply was, "You shall be obeyed."

In the meanwhile, the men-at-arms and the followers of De Coucy, who had paused to breathe after the first heat of the affray, began to mingle in conversation regarding the events that had just taken place, and the causes which had given rise to them; and very soon all the noise and clamour of explanation and wonderment, and questioning, and boasting, succeeded, which usually follows any very active struggle. In the course of this hubbub, De Coucy's name, situation, quality, the news he had heard concerning Guillaume de la Roche Guyon, and the means he had taken to surprise him and deliver the lady Isadore, were explained to everybody whom it might concern, with that almost childish frankness and simplicity which was one of the chief characteristics of the age of chivalry.

To this the King listened attentively; and then, turning to De Coucy, he said, "Sir Guy de Coucy, this adventure which you have just achieved is worthy of your other exploits! I will beg leave to ride with your train to Paris, where doubtless you are going. This good knight," he added, pointing to the leader of the troop from the castle, "informs me that the lady your good sword has delivered from that traitor Guillaume de la Roche Guyon, is in safety with the fair Queen Agnes, and he adds, that it is the Queen's will that no man, except the garrison of the castle, shall be admitted within the walls."

"If such be the case, I must submit, of course," replied De Coucy; "and yet I would fain speak but a few words to the lady Isadore, to inform her why I attacked her escort; for, beyond all doubt, they lured her away from the château of Moulineaux upon some fine pretext."

"I will take care that your conduct be rightly stated, beau sire," replied the officer. "But as to your speaking with the lady, I fear it cannot be; for the Queen will doubtless hold her, both as a liege vassal of the crown, and as hostage for her father's faith; and she has vowed that during her absence from our noble lord the King, no man shall enter her gates, except such persons as the King himself has placed about her. Be assured, however, sir knight, that the lady shall receive all honourable treatment, and that your high deeds and noble prowess shall be spoken of in becoming terms."

De Coucy mused a moment. "Well," said he, at length, "what must be, must be! To Paris then! for I bear the King both sad and important news."

"Ha!" cried Philip; but then again remembering his disguise, he added, "Are they such as a stranger may hear?"

"They are such, sir unknown knight," replied De Coucy, "as will be soon heard of, far and wide. But the King's ears must be the first to hear my tale. D'Auvergne," he added, turning to the Count, "I pray you, let my page bind up that gash upon your temple. If I see rightly by this pale light, the blood is streaming from it still. Let him stanch it for thee, I pray!"

"Not so, not so, good friend," replied the Count, who, while this conversation had been passing amongst the rest, had been leaning silently against an oak, with his eyes bent thoughtfully upon the ground,—"Not so! It does me good. Methinks that every drop which trickles down and drops on the dust at my feet, takes some of the fire out of my brain. I have been mad, I fear me, De Coucy, I am not quite right yet; but I know—I feel, that I have done this good knight some wrong. Pardon me, sir knight," he added, advancing to the King, and extending his hand, "pardon me, as you are a good knight and true."

"I do, from my soul," replied the monarch, grasping the Count's offered hand, and casting from his heart at the same moment far greater feelings of enmity than any one present knew but himself,—"I do, from my soul. But you stagger! you are faint! Bind up his wound, some one! Stanch the blood; he has lost too much already!"

The monarch spoke in a tone of command that soon called prompt obedience. The Count d'Auvergne's wound was instantly bound up; but before the bleeding could be stopped, he fainted, and in that state was borne to the cave from which he had first issued to attack the King. Here he was laid on a bed of moss and straw, which seemed to have formed his usual couch; and was, after some difficulty, recalled to animation.

Having so far seen him restored to a state of safety, De Coucy, burthened with the tidings of Arthur's murder, which he was eager to announce as soon as possible to the sovereign and peers of France, bade adieu to his unhappy friend; and leaving the page and one of the men to guard and tend him, he set out with the King on the road to Paris. One of De Coucy's followers, who was severely wounded, was left to the care of the seneschal of the castle, who also undertook to see the rites of sepulture bestowed on one or two of the soldiers whose lives had been sacrificed in the affray.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE particulars of De Coucy's journey to Paris are not worth recording. He paused for two hours at a village near Meulan, with his followers and his royal companion, for the purpose of resting their weary horses; but neither of the knights took any repose themselves, though the fatigues they had undergone might well have called for it.

The conduct of De Coucy somewhat puzzled the King; for it evinced a degree of calm respect towards him, which Philip judged the young knight would hardly have shown, had he not recognised him by some of those signs which, when seized on by a keen and observing eye, render attempts at disguise almost always abortive.

At the same time, neither by indiscreet word, nor meaning glance, did De Coucy betray that he had any absolute knowledge of the quality of him whose limbs that plain armour covered. He spoke frankly and freely on all subjects, started various topics of conversation himself, and, in short, took care to bound his respect to grave courtesy, without any of that formal reverence which might have directed the attention of others to what he had observed himself.

There was one, however, in the train not quite so cautious.

Gallon the fool—though we left him last at the top of one of the highest oaks in the wood, whither he had carried, piece by piece, the rich armour he had stripped from Guillaume de la Roche Guyon, together with a well-lined pouch of chamois leather—had since taken care to rejoin the victorious party, with all his acquirements nicely bundled up on the crupper of his horse, forming a square not unlike the pack with which wandering minstrels travelled in those days.

On the road he was very still and thoughtful. Whether it was that he was calculating in silence the value of his plunder, or that he was sullen from fatigue, his companions could not well tell; but when the party stopped, Gallon watched his opportunity, when De Coucy was alone, gazing at the pale moon, and indulging in such dreams as moonlight only yields. Stealing up

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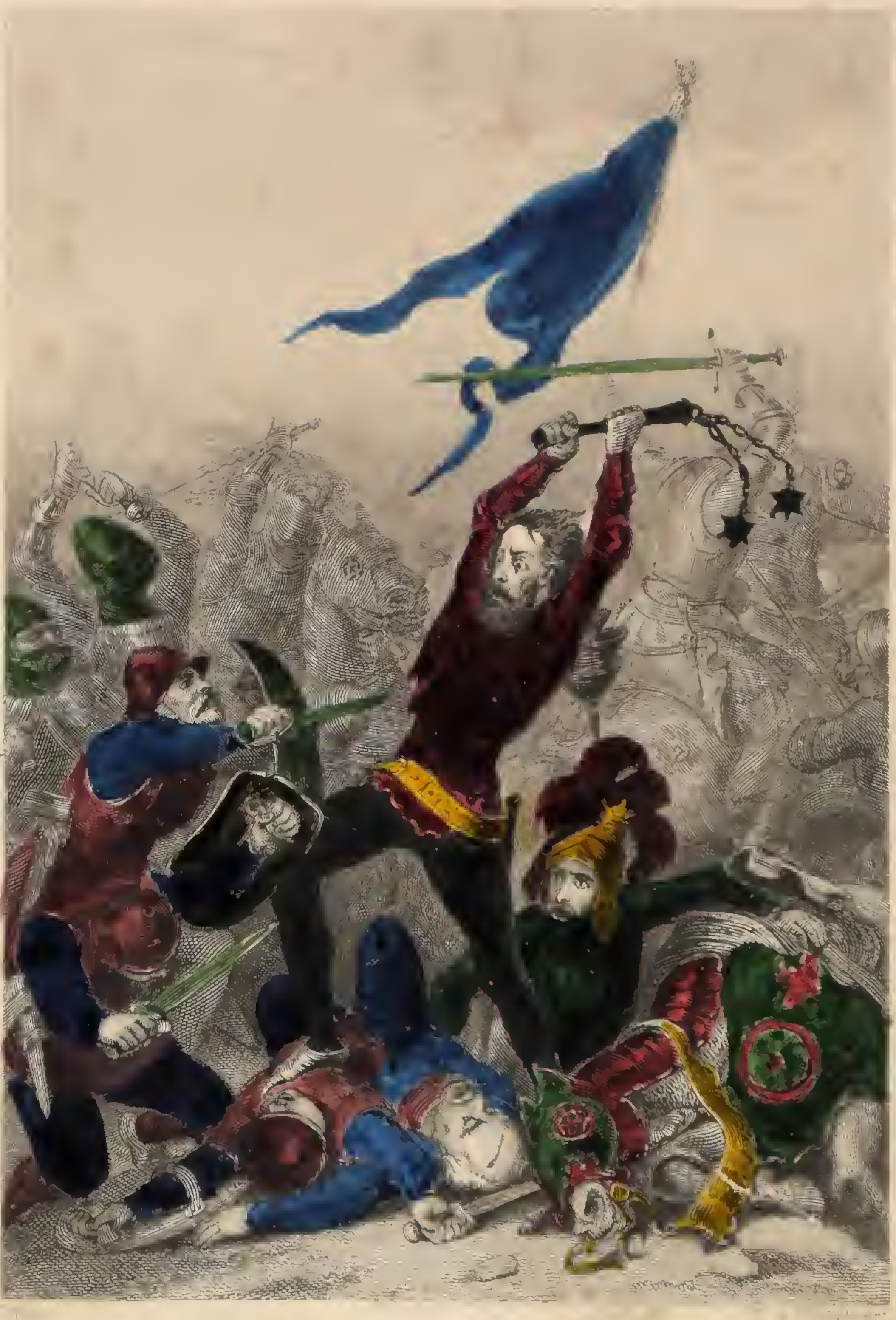

THE SAFETY OF THE WHOLE [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] OF
THE KING, THE DESTINY OF ALL FOR [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]
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to his lord, the juggler peered cunningly in his face, saying, in a low voice, "Oh, Coucy! Coucy! I could show you such a trick for taming a lion;" and at the same time he bent his thumb back over his shoulder, pointing to where the monarch stood at a few yards' distance.

"Silence, fool!" said the knight, in a deep stern voice, adding, a moment afterwards, "what mean you, Gallon?"

"Did you not hear him cry, 'Denis Mountjoy! Denis Mountjoy!' when he joined the fight?" demanded Gallon.—"Coucy, Coucy! you might tame a lion an' you would!"

De Coucy caught Gallon by the arm, and whispered in his ear a stern menace if he kept not silence. After which he turned at once to the King, saying aloud, "We had better to horse, fair sir, or it will be late ere we reach the city."

"Haw, haw!" shouted Gallon,—"haw, haw!" and bounding away, he was the first in the saddle.

When they were within sight of Paris, the King thanked De Coucy for the pleasure of his fair company; and, saying that they should doubtless soon meet at the court, he took leave of the young knight, as if his road lay in somewhat a different direction, and rode on, his horse putting forth all his speed to reach the well-known stable. The young knight followed more slowly; and, proceeding across the bridge, directed his steps to the palace on the island.

In the court he found a crowd of inferior ecclesiastics with robes, and stoles, and crosses, and banners, and all the pompous display of Romish magnificence, mingled with the King's serjeants-at-arms, and many a long train of retainers belonging to several of the great vassals of the crown, who seemed to be at that moment at the court. The young knight dismounted in the midst of them, and sent in to crave an audience of the King, giving his business, as it well deserved, the character of important.

A reply was soon returned, purporting that Sir Guy de Coucy was ever welcome to the King of France, and the knight was instantly marshalled to the presence-chamber.

Philip stood at the further extremity of the magnificent gothic hall, a part of which still remains in the old palace of the kings of France. He was habited in a wide tunic of rich purple silk, bound round his waist by a belt of gold, from which hung his sword of state. The neck and sleeves were tied with gold, and from his shoulders descended a mantle of crimson sendal, lined throughout with ermines, which fell in broad and glossy folds upon the floor. On his head he wore a jewelled cap of crimson velvet, from under which the glossy waves of his long fair hair fell down in some disarray upon his shoulders. In any other man, the haste with which he had changed his apparel would have appeared; but Philip, in person even, was formed to be a king; and, in the easy grace of his figure, and the dignified erectness of his carriage, hurry or negligence of dress was never seen; or appeared but to display the innate majesty of his demeanour to greater advantage.

He stood with one foot rather advanced, and his chest and head thrown back, while his eagle eye fixed with a keen and somewhat stern regard upon a mitred prelate—the Abbot of Three Fountains Abbey—who seemed to have been speaking the moment before De Coucy entered. Guerin the chancellor, still in the simple dress of the knights hospitallers, stood beside the King; and around appeared a small but brilliant circle of nobles, amongst whom were to be seen the Dukes of Burgundy and Champagne, the Counts of Nevers and Dampierre; and the unhappy Count of Toulouse, afterwards sacrificed to the intolerant spirit of the Roman church.

"How is this?" said Philip, just as the young knight passed into the hall;—"will Rome never be satisfied? Do concessions wrung from our very heart's blood but stimulate new demands? What has Innocent the Third to do with the wars of Philip of France against his traitorous and rebellious vassal, John, Duke of Normandy? What pretext of clerical authority and the church's rights has the pontiff now to show, why a monarch should not in his own dominions compel his vassals to obedience, and punish crime and baseness? By the holy rood! there must be some new creed we have not heard of, to enjoin implicit obedience, in all temporal as well as spiritual things, to our moderate, temperate, holy father, Innocent the Third, and his successors for ever! We pray thee, my lord abbot, to communicate to us all the tenets of this blessed doctrine; and to tell us whether it has been made manifest by inspiration or revelation."

"You speak scornfully, my son," said the Abbot, mildly, "ay, and somewhat profanely; but you well know the causes that move our holy father to interfere, when he sees two christened kings wasting their blood, their treasure, and their time, in vain and impious wars against each other, while the holy sepulchre is still the prey of miscreants and infidels, and the land of our blessed Redeemer,—the land in which so many saints have died, and for which so many heroes have bled,—still lies bowed down to heathens and blasphemers,—you well know the causes that move him to interfere, I say, and, therefore, need ask no new motive for his christianlike and holy zeal."

"His christianlike and holy zeal!" exclaimed the King, holding up his hands. "Ay, Abbot," he continued, his lip curling with a bitter smile, "I do know the causes, and Christendom shall find I estimate them justly. For all answer, then, to the mild, good father Pope his exhortation to peace, I reply that Philip is King of France; and that, though I will, in all strictly ecclesiastical affairs, yield reverence and due submission to the supreme pontiff; yet when he dares—ay, when he dares, Abbot—to use the word *command* to me, in my just wars, or in the dispensation of justice unto my vassals, I shall scoff his idle threats to scorn, and, by God's will, pursue my way, as if there were neither priest nor prelate on the earth. Now, fair Sir Guy de Coucy! most welcome to Philip of France!" he continued, abruptly turning away from the Abbot, and addressing the young knight. "We were arming even now to march to deliver you and our fair cousin Arthur Plantagenet. What cheer do you bring us from him?"

"I had hoped, my liege," replied De Coucy, with a pained and melancholy air, "that fame, who speeds fast enough in general to bear ill news, would have spared me the hard and bitter task of telling you what I have to communicate. He for whom you inquire is no more! Basely has he been murdered in the prisons of Rouen by his own uncle, John, King of England!"

Philip's brow had been cloudy before; but as the young knight spoke, fresh shadows came quickly over it, as we see storm after storm roll up over a thundery sky. At the same time, each of the nobles of France took an involuntary step forward, and with knitted brow, and eager, horrified eyes, gazed upon De Coucy while he told his news.

"God of heaven!" exclaimed the monarch, rapidly. "What would you say? Are you very sure, sir knight? Not with his own hand? His nephew too! His own brother's child! As noble a boy as ever looked up in the face of heaven! Speak, sir knight! Speak! What was the manner of his death! Have you heard? But be careful that each word be founded on certain knowledge, for on your lips hangs the fate of thousands!"

De Coucy related clearly and distinctly all that had occurred on the day of Arthur's murder—all that he had seen, all that he had heard; but, with scrupulous care, he took heed that not one atom of surmise should mingle with his discourse. He painted strongly, clearly, minutely, every circumstance; but he left his auditors to draw their own conclusions.

The nobles of France looked silently in each other's faces, where each read the same feelings of horror and indignation that swelled in his own bosom. At the same time the King glanced his keen eye round the circle, with a momentary gaze of inquiry at the countenances of his barons, as if he sought to gather whether the feelings of wrath and hatred which the young knight's tale had stirred up in his heart were common to all around.

"Now, by the bones of the saints!" cried he, "we will this day—nay, this hour,—send a herald to defy that felon king, and dare him to the field. Ho! serjeant-at-arms, bid Mountjoy hither!"

"I have already, my lord," said De Coucy, "presumed, even before bearing you this news, to defy King John, before his court; and, accusing him of this foul murder, to dare his barons—all, or any who should deny the fact—to meet me in arms, upon the quarrel."

"Ha!" cried Philip, eagerly. "What said his nobles?—Did they believe your charge? Did they take up your gage, sir knight?"

"It seems, Sire," replied De Coucy, "that the tidings of the Prince's murder were already common amongst the English barons; and, from what I could gather, some of their body had already charged John of Anjou with it before I came. As to my gauntlet, several of the knights stepped forward to raise it—for, to do the lords of England justice, they are never backward to draw the sword, right or wrong—but Lord Pembroke interposed; and, taking up the gage, said that he would hold it in all honour, till the King should have cleared himself, to their satisfaction, of the accusation which I brought against him; hinting some doubt, however, that he could do so. Nevertheless, he promised either to meet me in arms in fair field of combat, or to return me my gage, acknowledging the King's quarrel to be bad."

"'Tis evident enough!" cried the King. "The barons of England—who are ever willing to support their monarch in any just cause," he added, with a peculiar emphasis, not exactly reproachful, but certainly intended to convey to the ears on which it fell a warning of the monarch's expectations, — "the barons of England are already aware of this hateful deed, or not one of them would for a moment hesitate to draw the sword in defence of his King. Poor Arthur!" he continued, casting his eyes on the ground, and letting his mind wander over the past, —"poor Arthur! thou wert as hopeful a youth as ever a mother was blessed withal — as fair, as engaging a boy — and now thine unhappy mother is sonless, as well as widowed. I had hoped to have seated thee on the throne of thine ancestors, and to have made thy mother's heart glad in the sight of thy renewed prosperity. But thou art gone, poor child! and left few so fair and noble behind. In faith, lords! I could weep that boy's loss," continued the King, dashing a drop from his proud eye. "His youth promised so splendidly, that his manhood *must* have proved great.—Lord Abbot," he added, gravely, turning to the Abbot of Three Fountains, "you have marked what has passed this day — you have heard what I have heard, — and, if there needs any farther answer to him that sent you to preach me from my purpose of punishing a rebellious vassal, tell him that John of Anjou has added murder to treachery; and that Philip of France will never sheathe the sword till he has fully avenged the death of Arthur Plantagenet!"

"I have indeed heard what has passed, Sire, with horror and dismay," replied the Abbot; "but still, without at all seeking to impugn the faith or truth of this good knight, whose deeds in defence of the holy sepulchre have been heard of by all men, and warrant his Christian truth—yet still he saw not the murder committed."

Philip knit his brow and gnawed his lip impatiently, glancing his eye round the circle with a scornful and meaning smile; and muttering to himself, "Roman craft—Roman craft!"

Whether the Abbot heard it or not, he took instantly a higher tone. "I irritate you, Sir King!" said he, "by speaking truth; but still you must thus far hear me. The Pope—the holy head of the common Christian church, finding himself called upon to exert all the powers entrusted to him for the deliverance of the holy city of Jerusalem, has resolved that he will compel all Christian kings to cease their private quarrels, and lay by their vindictive animosities, till the great object of giving deliverance to Christ's sepulchre be accomplished."

"Compel!" cried Philip, the living lightning flashing from his eyes. "By Heaven! priest, the King he can compel to sheathe the sword of righteous vengeance out against a murderer is formed of different metal from Philip of France. So tell the pontiff! Let him cast again the interdict upon the land if he will. The next time I pray him to raise it, shall be at the gates of Rome with my lance in my hand, and my shield upon my breast. My supplication shall be the voice of trumpets, and my kneeling the trampling of my war-horse in the courts of the capitol.—What say ye, barons? Have I spoken well?"

"Well! Well! Well!" echoed the peers around, enraged beyond moderation at the prelate's daring protection of a murderer; and at the same moment the Duke of Burgundy laid the finger of his right hand upon the pommel of his sword, with a meaning glance towards the King.

"Ay, Burgundy, my noble friend! thou art right," said Philip; "with our swords we will show our freedom.—Look not scared, sir Abbot, but know, that we are not such children as to be deceived with tales of holy wars, when the question is, whether a murderer shall be punished. Away with such pretences! This war against the assassin of my noble boy, Arthur of Brittany, is *my* holy war, and never was one more just and righteous.—Ha, Mountjoy!" he added, as the king-of-arms entered, "we have a task for thee, fitted for so noble a knight and so learned a herald. John of Anjou has murdered Arthur Plantagenet, his nephew, in prison. Here stands in witness thereof, Sir Guy de Coucy——"

"Good knight and noble! if ever one lived," said the herald, bowing his head to De Coucy.

"Go, then, to the false traitor John," continued the King, "defy him in our name! tell him that we will have blood for blood; and that the death of all the thousands which shall fall in his unrighteous quarrel we cast upon his head. Tell him, that we will never sheathe the sword, so long as he possesses one foot of ground in France; and that when we have even driven him across his bulwark of the sea, we will overleap that too, and the avenging blade shall plague him at his very hearth.—Yet hold!" cried Philip, pausing in the midst of the passion into which he had worked himself, and reining in his wrath, to guide it in the course of his greater purposes; as a skilful charioteer bends the angry and impetuous fire of his horses, to whirl him on with more energetic celerity to the goal within his view. "Yet hold! ————" and Philip carried his hand to his brow, catching, as by inspiration, the outline of that bright stroke of policy which, more than any other act of his whole reign, secured to the monarchs of France the absolute supremacy of their rule — the judgment of John of Anjou, the greatest feudatory of the crown, by the united peers of France.

If he made the war against John a personal one between himself and the King of England, he might be supported by his barons, and come off victorious in the struggle, it was true; but if he summoned John, as Duke of Normandy, to receive judgment from his sovereign court in a case of felony, it established his jurisdiction over his higher vassals, on a precedent such as none would ever dare in after years to resist. It did more; for, if John were condemned by his peers, of which Philip entertained not a moment's doubt, the barons of France would be bound to support their own award; and the tie between them and him would become, not the unstable one of voluntary service, rendered and refused as caprice might dictate, but a strictly feudal duty with which all would be interested to comply.

Philip saw, at a glance, the immense increase of stability which he might give to his power by this great exercise of his rights; and, clear-sighted himself, he hardly doubted that his barons would see it also, and perhaps oppose his will. Certain, however, that by the feudal system, his right to summon John, and judge him in his court, was clear and undeniable, he resolved to carry it through, at all events; but determined, first, to propose it to his nobles as a concession that he himself made to their privileges.

What is long and tedious, as the slow eye or slower pen travels over the paper, is but the work of a moment to the mind; and Philip had, in the pause of one brief instant, caught every consideration that affected the idea before him, and determined upon his line of conduct.

"Hold!" said he, to the herald — "hold! My lords," he continued, turning to the nobles, by whom he was surrounded, "in my first wrath against this base murderer, I had forgot that, though I have the indisputable right of warring upon him as a monarch, yet I cannot justly punish him as a felon, strictly speaking, without your judgment previously pronounced upon him. I would not willingly trespass upon the privileges of any of my noble vassals; and therefore, lords—you Dukes of Burgundy and Champagne, and whatever other peers of France are present, I resign the judgment of this John of Anjou into your hands. I will summon him to appear before my court of peers, at the end of twenty days, to answer the charges brought against him. The peers of France shall judge him according to their honour and his demerits; and I will stand by in arms, to see that judgment executed." The peers of France could hardly have refused to assist at the trial to which Philip called them, even had they been so willed; but, far behind the monarch in intellect, and indignant at the baseness of John of Anjou, they now eagerly expressed their approval of the King's determination; and again plighted themselves to support him in his war against the English sovereign, whether that war was maintained as a consequence of the judgment they should give, or as a continuation of that which had already commenced.

The herald, then, was instantly despatched to Rouen, for the purpose of displaying the articles of accusation against John at the court of Normandy, and of summoning him to appear on the twentieth day at Paris, to answer the charges to be there substantiated. At the same time, the legate of the holy see, very well convinced that, in the present case, the thunders of the church would fall harmless at the feet of Philip, though launched with ever so angry a hand, took leave of the monarch with a discontented air; and as he left the hall, the monarch's lip curled, and his eye lightened, with a foretaste of that triumph which he anticipated over the proud priest who had so darkly troubled the current of his domestic happiness.

"Beau sire De Coucy," said the King, turning to the young knight with a bland smile, as he recalled his thoughts from the contemplation of the future, "notwithstanding the sad news you have brought us, you are most welcome to the court of France. Nor will we fail to repay your sufferings, as far as our poor means will go. In the meanwhile, we beg of you to make our palace your home till such time as, with sounding trumpets and lances in rest, we shall march to punish the assassin of Arthur Plantagenet. Then shall you lead, to aid in the revenge I know you thirst to take, all the fair host raised on the lands of the Count de Tankerville, full a thousand archers and two hundred knights. At supper, noble lords," continued the King, "I trust that all here will grace my board with their presence. Ere then, I have a bitter task to perform—to break to a fond mother the death of her noble boy, and to soothe the sorrows of a helpless widow."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

One unchanging cloud of perpetual sorrow lowered over the days of the unhappy Agnes de Meranie. The hope that the council which had been called to decide upon the King's divorce might pronounce a judgment favourable to her wishes, dwindled gradually away, till its flickering, uncertain light was almost more painful than the darkness of despair. The long delays of the church of Rome, the tedious minutiæ of all its ceremonious forms, the cavillings upon words, the endless technicalities, however sweet and enduring was her disposition, wore her mind and her frame, and she faded away like a rose at the end of summer, dropping leaf by leaf towards decay.

She delighted no longer in things wherein she had most joyed. The opening flowers of the spring, the chanting of the wild melodious birds, the reviving glow of all nature's face after the passing of the long, chill winter, brought her no happiness. Her heart had lost its young expansion. Her eyes were covered with a dim, shadowy veil, that gave its own dull, sombre hue to all that she beheld. Her ears were closed against every sound that spoke of hope, or pleasure, or enjoyment. Her life was one long, sad dream, over joys passed away, and happiness never to return.

For many and many an hour, she would wander about through the woods; but when she saw the young green leaves opening out from the careful covering with which nature had defended their infancy, she would recall the time when, with her beloved husband, she had watched the sweet progress of the spring, and would weep to find him no longer by her side, and to see in the long, cold future an unchanging prospect of the same dull vacancy. Often, too, she would stray to the top of one of the high hills near the castle, and, gazing over the wide-extended view—the sea of woods waving their tender green heads below her—the mingling hills, and valleys, and plains beyond—the windings of the broad river, with the rich, rich vale through which it flows,—and the distant gleams of towers and spires scattered over the fair face of the bright land of France, she would sigh as she looked upon the proud kingdom of her Philip, and would quickly shrink back from the wide extension of the scene to the small limit of her heart's feelings and her individual regrets.

She shrunk, too, from society. Her women followed, but followed at a distance; for they saw that their presence importuned her; and it was only when any message arrived from the King, or any news was brought concerning the progress of his arms, that they broke in upon her reveries. Then, indeed, Agnes listened as if her whole soul was in the tale; and she made the narrators repeat over and over again every small particular. She heard that one castle had fallen—that another district had submitted—that this baron had come over to the crown of France—or that city had laid its keys at the feet of Philip, dwelling on each minute circumstance, both of warfare and of policy, with as deep and curious an interest as if her life and hope had depended on the issue of each particular movement.

It was remarked, too, that the oftener the name of Philip was repeated in the detail, the more interest she appeared to take therein, and the more minute was her questioning; and if any eminent success had attended his arms, it would communicate a gleam of gladness to her eyes, that hardly left them during the whole day.

At other times she spoke but little, for it seemed to fatigue her; and though, from the blush of her cheek, which every evening seemed to come back brighter and brighter, and from a degree of glistening splendour in her eye, which grew more brilliant than it had ever been even in her happier days, her women augured returning health, yet her strength visibly failed; and that lovely hand, whose small but rounded symmetry had been a theme for half the poets of France, grew pale and thin, so that the one loved ring nearly dropped from the finger round which it hung.

It was not from a love of new things or new faces, for no one was more constant in all her affections than Agnes de Meranie; but though she avoided even the society of her own immediate followers, several of whom had attended upon her in her own land, yet Isadore of the Mount, from the time she had taken refuge in the castle where she was still detained by royal order, was often welcomed by the Queen with a smile that the others could not win.

Perhaps the secret was, that Isadore never tried to console her—that she seemed to feel that the name of comfort under such circumstances was but a mockery; and though she strove, gently and sweetly, to divert the mind of the unhappy Princess from the immediate subject of her grief, she did it by soft degrees, and never sought for a gaiety that she did not feel herself, and which she saw was sadly discordant with all the feelings of the Queen when affected by others in the hope of pleasing her.

One morning, towards the end of March, on entering the apartments of the Queen, Isadore found her with her head bent over her hand, and her eyes fixed upon the small circle of gold that had bound her to Philip Augustus, while drop after drop swelled through the long lashes of her eyelids, and fell upon the ring itself. Seeing that she wept, Isadore was about to retire; for there is a sacredness in grief such as hers, that a feeling heart would never violate.

The Queen, however, beckoned her forward, and looking up, wiped the tears away. "One must be at a sad pitch of fortune, Isadore," said she, with a painful smile at her own melancholy conceit,—"one must be at a sad pitch of fortune, when even inanimate things play the traitor and leave us in our distress. This little magic symbol," she continued, laying one finger of the other hand upon the ring,—"this fairy token, that in general is destined to render two hearts happy or miserable, according to the virtue of the giver and the receiver—it has fallen from my finger this morning, though it has been my comfort through many a sorrow. Is not that ominous, Isadore?"

"Of nothing evil, I hope, lady," replied Isadore. "Trust me, 'tis but to show that it will be put on again under happier auspices."

"'Twill be in heaven, then," replied Agnes, fixing her eyes on the thin fair hand which lay on the table before her. "'Twill be in heaven, then! Do you, too, deceive yourself, lady?—Isadore, Isadore! the canker-worn of grief has not only eaten the leaves of the blossom, it has blasted it to the heart. I would not die if I could avoid my fate, for it will give Philip pain; but for me, lady,—for me, the grave is the only place of peace. Care must have made some progress ere that ring, round which the flesh once rose up, as if to secure it for ever as its own, would slip with its own weight to the ground."

Isadore bent her head, and was silent; for she saw, that to speak of hope at that moment would be worse than vain.

"I had been trying," said the Queen, clinging to the subject with a sort of painful fondness,—"I had been trying to write something to Constance of Brittany, that might console her for the loss of her poor boy Arthur. But I blotted many a page in vain, and found how hard it is to speak one word of comfort to real grief. I know not whether it was that my mind still selfishly turned to my own sorrows, and took from me the power of consoling those of others, or whether there is really no such thing as consolation upon earth; but, still as I wrote, I found each line more calculated to sadden than to cheer. At last I abandoned the task, and letting my hand which had held the paper drop beside me, this faithless pledge of as true a love as ever bound two hearts, dropped from my finger and rolled away from me. Oh! Isadore, 'twas surely an evil omen! But it was not that which made me weep. As I put it on again, I thought of the day that it had first shone upon my hand, and all the images of lost happiness rose up around me like the spectres of dead friends, calling me too to join the past; and oh! how the bright and golden forms of those sunny days contrasted with the cold, hard sorrow of each hour at present. Oh! Isadore, 'tis not the present, I believe, that ever makes our misery; 'tis its contrast with the past—'tis the loss of some hope, or the crushing of some joy—the disappointment of expectation, or the regrets of memory. The present is nothing—nothing—nothing, but in its relation to the future or the past."

"How painful, then, must be that contrast to the poor Duchess of Brittany," said Isadore, in reply, taking advantage of the mention that the Queen had made of Constance, to lead her mind away from the contemplation of her own griefs. "How bitter must be her tears for that gallant young Prince Arthur, when all France is weeping for him! Not a castle throughout the land but rings, they say, with the tale of his murder. Not a bosom but beats with indignation against his assassin. I have just heard that Sir Guy de Coucy, who was his fellow-prisoner, defied John Lackland in the midst of his barons, and cast down his gauntlet at the foot of the very throne. The messenger," she added, casting down her eyes as the Queen raised hers, for there came a certain tell-tale glow into her cheek as she spoke of De Coucy, that she did not care to be remarked,—"the messenger you sent to the canon of St. Berthe's has but now returned, bringing news from Paris concerning the Court of Peers held upon the murderer, and affirming that he has refused to appear before the barons of France—at least, so says my girl Eleanor."

The news of Arthur's death, and various particulars concerning it, had spread in vague rumours to every castle in France. Many and various were the shapes which the tale had assumed, but of course it had reached Agnes de Meranie and her suite in somewhat of a more authentic form. All that concerned Philip in any way was of course a matter of deep interest to her. Isadore's plan for withdrawing her mind for the moment from herself had therefore its full effect, and she instantly directed the messenger to be brought to her, for the purpose of learning from him all that had occurred at the Court of Peers, to which assembly, however, we shall conduct our reader in his own person.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

To those who have not studied the spirit of the feudal system, it would seem an extraordinary and almost inconceivable anomaly, that one sovereign prince should have the power of summoning to his court, and trying as a felon, another of dominions scarcely less extensive than his own. But the positions of vassal and lord were not so incoherent or ill-defined as may be imagined. Each possessor of a feof, at the period of his investiture, took upon himself certain obligations towards the sovereign under whom he held, from which nothing could enfranchise him, as far as that feof was concerned; and upon his refusing, or neglecting to comply with those obligations, the territory enfeofed or granted returned in right to what was called the capital lord, or him, in short, who granted it.

To secure, however, that even justice should be done between the vassal and the lord—each equally an interested party—it became necessary that some third person, or body of persons, should possess the power of deciding on all questions between the other two. Thus it became a fundamental principle of the feudal system, that no vassal could be judged but by his peers, —that is to say, by persons holding in the same relative position as himself, from the same superior. For the purpose of rendering these judgments, each great baron held, from time to time, his court, composed of vassals holding directly from himself; and, in like manner, the King's Court of Peers was competent to try all causes affecting the feudatories who held immediately from the crown.

John, therefore, was summoned to appear before the court of Philip Augustus, not as King of England, which was an independent sovereignty, but as Duke of Normandy, and Lord of Anjou, Poitou, and Guyenne, all feofs of the crown of France. No one, therefore, doubted the competence of the court, and John himself dared not deny its authority.

It was a splendid sight, the palace of the Louvre on the morning appointed for the trial. Each of the great barons of France, anxious that none of his peers should outvie him in the splendour of his train, had called together all his most wealthy retainers, and presented himself at the court of the King, followed by a host of knights and nobles, clothed in the graceful flowing robes worn in that day, shining with gold and jewels, and flaunting with all the gay colours that the art of dyeing could then produce. Silks and velvets, and cloths of gold and silver, contended in gorgeous rivalry, in the courts and antechambers of the palace. Flags and pennons, banners and banderols, fluttered on the breeze; while all the most beautiful horses that could be procured, were led in the various trains, by the pages and squire, unmounted; as if their graceful forms were too noble to bear even the burden of a prince.

In the great hall itself the scene was more solemn, but scarcely less magnificent. Around, in the midst of all the gorgeous decorations of a royal court on its day of solemn ceremony, sat all the highest and noblest of France, clothed in those splendid robes of ermine, which, independent of any associations of their value, from the very snowy whiteness, and the massy folds into which that peculiar fur falls, gives an idea of majesty and grandeur that no other dress can convey. Each bore upon his coronetted* brow the lines of stern and impressive gravity; for all deeply felt how solemn was the occasion on which they had met, how terrible was the cause of their assembly, and how mighty would be the consequences of their decision. The feeling was near akin to awe; and many of the younger peers scarcely seemed to breathe, lest they should disturb the silence.

In the centre, surrounded by all the insignia of royalty, upon a throne raised several steps above the hall, and covered by a dais of crimson and gold, sat Philip Augustus—a monarch indeed, in mind, in person, and in look. There was a simple bandlet of gold around his brows,† raised with *fleurs de lis*, and jewelled with fine uncut stones; but the little distinction which existed between it and the coronets of his peers would have hardly marked the sovereign. Though personal appearance, however, is indeed no sign of dignity, either of mind or station, yet Philip Augustus was not to be mistaken. There was royalty in his eye and his carriage. The custom of command shone out in every line; and though there were many noble and princely persons present, there was none like him.

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* Seldon has said that the custom of bearing coronets by peers is of late days. In this assertion, however, he is apparently mistaken, the proofs of which may be seen at large in Ducange, Dissert. xxiv. R. Hoved. 792. Hist. des Compté de Poiton, &c. The matter is of little consequence, except so far as the representation of the manners and customs of the times is affected by it.

† The closed crown was not introduced until the reign of Louis XII. or Francis I.

On the King's left hand stood Mountjoy, king-at-arms, holding a scroll, containing the appeal of Constance, Duchess of Brittany, to the peers of France, for the punishment of John, called unjustly—it went on to state—King of England, for the murder of Arthur Plantagenet, his nephew and born sovereign, her son.

On the right stood De Coucy, neither armed nor clothed in his robes as peer, though, however small his territories, their being free and held under no one, gave him such a right; but being there as the chief accuser of John, he sat not of course amongst those called to judge him.

Several of the peers' seats were vacant; and, before proceeding to the immediate business on which the court had met, various messengers were admitted, to offer the excuses of the several barons, who, either from want of power or inclination, were not present in person. The apology of most was received as sufficient; but, at the names of several, the King's brow darkened, and he turned a meaning look to his chancellor, Guerin, who stood at a little distance.

When this part of the ceremony was concluded, Philip made a sign to the king-of-arms, who, having waved his hand to still a slight murmur that had been caused by the admission of the messengers, proceeded to read the petition of Constance of Brittany; and then, followed by a train of heralds and marshals, advanced to the great doors of the hall, which were thrown open at his approach; and, in a loud voice, summoned John, Duke of Normandy, to appear before the peers of France, and answer to the charge of Constance Duchess of Brittany.

Three times he repeated the call, as a matter of ceremony; and, between each reiteration, the trumpets sounded, and then gave a pause for reply.

At length, after a brief conversation with some persons without, the heralds returned, introducing two persons as deputies for John, who, as every one there already knew, was not, and would not be present. The one was a bishop, habited in his pontifical robes, and the other the well-known Hubert de Burgh.

"Sir deputies, you are welcome," said the King, as the two Normans advanced to the end of the table in the centre of the hall. "Give us the cause why John of Anjou does not present himself before his peers, to answer the charges against him. Say, is he sick to the death? Or, does he dare deny the competence of my court?"

"He is neither sick, sire," replied the bishop, "nor does he, as Duke of Normandy, at all impugn the authority of the peers of France, to judge upon all questions within the limits of this kingdom." Philip's brow relaxed. "But," continued the bishop, "before trusting himself in a city, and a land, where he has many and bitter enemies, he demands that the King of France shall guarantee his safety."

"Willingly," replied Philip; "let him come! I will warrant him from harm or from injustice."

"But will you equally stake your royal word," demanded the bishop, fixing his eyes keenly on the King, as if he feared some deceit—"will you stake your royal word that he shall return safely to his own land?"

"Safely shall he return," replied the King, with a clear, marked, and distinct voice, "if the judgment of his peers permit him so to do."

"But if the peers condemn him," asked the bishop, "will you give him a safe conduct?"

"No! by the Lord of heaven and earth!" thundered the King. "No! If his peers condemn him, he shall suffer the punishment his peers award, should they doom him to the block, the cord, or the wheel! Their sentence shall be executed to the letter."

"You well know, then, sire King," replied the bishop, calmly, "that John, King of England, cannot submit himself to your court. The realm of England cannot be put at the disposition of the barons of France, by its King submitting to their judgment; neither would our English barons suffer it."

"What is that to me?" cried Philip. "Because my vassal, the Duke of Normandy, increases his domains, do I, as his sovereign, lose my rights? By heaven's host, no! Go, heralds, to the courts, and the bridges, and the highways, and summon John of Anjou to present himself before his peers! Sir bishop, you have done your embassy; and, if you stay but half an hour, you shall hear the judgment of our court, on the cause of which we have met to take cognizance."

The bishop, however, and his companion, took their leave and departed; the bishop bowing low, in reverence to the court; and the stout Hubert de Burgh turning away after a calm, careless glance round the peers of France, as if he had just concluded a piece of needless ceremony, of which he was heartily tired.

For a moment or two after the deputies were gone, the barons continued to converse together in a whisper, while Philip sat without speaking, glancing his quick keen eye from one countenance to another, as if he would gather beforehand the terms of the judgment they were afterwards to pronounce. Gradually, complete silence began again to spread itself over the court; one baron after another dropping the conversation that he held with his neighbour, till all was still. There is always something awful in very profound silence; but when the silence of expectation on any great occasion has been prolonged for any extent of time, it becomes a sort of painful charm, which requires no small resolution to break.

Thus the peers of France, when once the stillness had completely established itself, sat without word or motion, waiting the return of the heralds, awed by the very quiet; though many of the more timid and undecided would fain have asked counsel of those next whom they sat, had they dared to break the spell that seemed to hang over the assembly.

Many a vague doubt and many a fear attached itself to the duty they were called upon to perform; for, even in that day, it was no small responsibility to set a world in arms, and renew that deluge of bloodshed that had so lately ceased. From time to time, under the influence of these feelings, the several peers gazed in the countenances of their fellows, to see if they were shaken by the same hesitations as themselves. But it is ever the bold that lead; and here and there, scattered through the assembly, might be seen a face that turned to no one for advice or support; but, with the eyes fixed on the ground, the brow bent, and the lips closed, seemed to offer a picture of stern determined resolution. It was these men who decided the deliberations of the day. For their opinions all waited, and all voices followed their lead.

At length the doors of the hall were again thrown open; and Mountjoy king-at-arms presented himself, informing the court that he had summoned John of Anjou, Duke of Normandy, in the courts, on the bridges, and the highways; and that he did not appear.

There was now a deep pause, and Philip turned his eyes to the Duke of Burgundy. He was a man of a dull, saturnine aspect, stout even to corpulency, with shaggy eyebrows overhanging his dark eyes, but with a high, finely formed nose, and small, well-shaped mouth, so that his countenance was stern without being morose, and striking without being handsome.

The great baron rose from his seat, while there was a breathless silence all around; and laying his hand upon his heart, he said, in a clear, stern tone, "I pronounce John of Anjou guilty of murder and disloyalty; I hold him a cruel and perverse traitor; and I declare that for these crimes his feofs of Normandy, Anjou, Poitou, Maine, and Guyenne, are justly forfeited to his sovereign lord, and he himself worthy of death, upon my honour!"

A murmur of approbation succeeded, for a great proportion of the barons had already determined upon a similar judgment; and those who had remained undecided, were glad of some one with whose opinion to establish their own. One after another now rose; and, notwithstanding all the hesitation which many had felt the moment before, there was not one dissenting voice from the condemnation pronounced by the Duke of Burgundy. Had there been any strong mind to oppose, half the peers would have followed him like a flock of sheep; but there was none, and they now all eagerly, and almost turbulently, pronounced judgment against John of Anjou, sentencing him unanimously to forfeiture of all his feofs, and every pain inflicted on high felony.

The silence was succeeded by a babble of tongues perfectly extraordinary; but the moment after, the voice of the King was heard above the rest, and all was again hushed.

What would, in the present day, smack of stage effect, was in perfect harmony with the manners, habits, and feelings of those times, when a spirit unknown to us—a moving principle whose force is now exhausted, or only felt even feebly in the breasts of a few—the spirit of chivalry, impelled men to everything that was singular and striking.

Philip rose majestically from his throne, drew his sword from the scabbard, and, advancing to the table, laid the weapon upon it naked. Then, gazing round the peers, he exclaimed, "To arms! to arms! Nobles of France, your judgment is pronounced! 'Tis time to enforce it with the sword! To arms! to arms! Lose no moments in vain words. Call together your vassals! Philip of France marches to execute your sentence against John of Anjou; and he calls on his barons to support their award! The day of meeting is the tenth from this, the place of *monstre* beneath the walls of château Galliard! let cowards leave me, and brave men follow me! and I will punish the traitor before a year be out."

So saying, he waved his hand to his peers; and, followed by the heralds and men-at-arms, left the hall of assembly.

The younger and less clear-sighted of the peers eagerly applauded Philip's brief appeal! But there was, in fact, a tone of triumph in it, which struck the more deep-thinking barons, and perhaps made them fear that they had that day consecrated a power, which might sooner or later be used against themselves. Doubt kept them silent, however; and they separated at once, to prepare for the campaign before them.

Philip Augustus lost no time. Scarcely had the herald carried to John of England the news of his condemnation by the court of peers, than every part of his dominions in France was invaded at once with an overpowering force.

Disgusted with his baseness, his treachery, and his levity, the barons of England afforded him but little aid, and the nobles of his French dominions, in most instances, yielded willingly to the King of France, who offered them friendship and protection on which they could rely. The greater towns, indeed, of Maine and Normandy still held for John, and made some show of resistance; but what by superior force and skill in war, and what by politic concessions, before two months were over the major part had been led to submit to Philip.

The war was of course begun, as was ever the case in those days, by hordes of plunderers of every description, who, on the very first call to arms, inundated Normandy, pillaging, ravaging, and destroying, sparing neither sex nor age, and, by their excesses, driving the people to submit willingly to the authority of the French monarch, who alone could afford them any sufficient protection. To the towns, Philip held out the promise of being rendered free communes under royal charters; to the barons he offered security in all their rights and privileges; and to the people, peace and safety. With these offers, and the sight of their accomplishment wherever they were accepted, on the one hand, and an immense and conquering army on the other, it is not at all wonderful that triumph should follow everywhere the royal standard of France.

John fled timidly into Guyenne, while the Earl of Salisbury, with small and inefficient forces, endeavoured in some degree to check the progress of the French monarch. Battles there were none, for the inequality of the two armies totally prevented William Longsword from hazarding anything like a general engagement; but sieges and skirmishes succeeded each other rapidly; and De Coucy had now the opportunity of drinking deep the cup of glory for which he had so long thirsted.

At the head of the retainers of the Count de Tankerville, which formed as splendid a leading as any in the army, he could display those high military talents which had always hitherto been confined to a narrower sphere. He did not neglect the occasion of doing so, and in castle and in bower, throughout all the land of France, wherever great deeds were spoken of, there was repeated the name of Sir Guy de Coucy.

In the meanwhile, still confined to the castle of Rolleboise, Isadore of the Mount heard, from day to day, of her lover's feats of arms; and, though she often trembled for his safety, with those timid fears from which a woman's heart, even in the days of chivalry, was never wholly free; yet, knowing the impulse that carried him forward, and proud of the affection which she had inspired and which she returned, whenever the name of the young knight was mentioned, her eye sparkled and her cheek glowed with love, and hope, and expectation.

Her father, she thought, after the base attempt made to carry her off by William de la Roche Guyon—of the particulars of which she was now fully aware—would never press her to wed so base a traitor; and who stood so fair to win the place that he had lost as Guy de Coucy? Thus whispered hope. Fear, however, had another discourse; and perhaps she listened as often to the tale of the one, as the other.

During this time, the Count d'Auvergne had recovered from the wound he had received; and, under the care of his own attendants, who, by the clue afforded by De Coucy, had rejoined him, soon acquired new strength—at least, of body. It was remarked, however, that, though while suffering excessive exhaustion from loss of blood, his mind had been far more clear and collected; yet, in proportion as he recovered his corporeal vigour, his intellectual faculties again abandoned him. His followers, who, notwithstanding the cold sternness of his manners, loved him with true feudal attachment, kept a continual watch upon him; but it was in vain they did so. With a degree of cunning, often joined to insanity, he contrived to deceive all eyes; and once more made his escape, leaving not a trace by which he could be followed.

Such was the situation of all the personages concerned in this history towards the end of the month of June, when suddenly the Earl of Salisbury, with the handful of men who had accompanied him, ceasing to hover round the King's army, harrassing it with continued skirmishes, as had been his custom, disappeared entirely, leaving all Normandy open and undefended. A thousand vague reports were instantly circulated through the camp; but the only correct one was that which was brought to the King's tent as he sat writing after the march of the morning.

"Well," cried Philip, as one of his most active scouts was ushered into his presence, "what news of the Earl of Salisbury? No more *I believes!* Give me some certainty."

"My lord," replied the man, "I am now sure; for I saw the rear-guard of his army in full march towards Boulogne. Mocking the jargon of the Normans, I spoke with some of the men, when I found that the whole host is boon for Flanders."

"Ha! so soon!" cried the King. "I knew not that they were so far prepared."

But, to explain the King's words, we must turn to the events which had been going on without the immediate limits of France, and which, while he was striding from victory to victory within his own dominions, threatened to overwhelm him by the combination of his external enemies with all his discontented vassals.

CHAPTER XL.

During the wars in Normandy and Maine, John had been absent, but not inactive; and, what by his single power he could not bring about, he resolved to accomplish by coalition. Many causes of enmity towards Philip Augustus existed amongst all the monarchs by whose territories his kingdom was surrounded, and not less amongst his own immediate vassals; and John at once saw, that his only hope of ever regaining the feofs that Philip had wrested from him, was in joining his own power with those of every enemy of the French monarch, and hurling him, by their united efforts, from the throne.

The English sovereign found no opposition to these schemes of policy. Otho, Emperor of Germany, had met in Philip an unceasing and irreconcileable adversary. Philip it was who had principally opposed his election; Philip it was who had raised candidate after candidate against him. Philip it was who had taken advantage of his late quarrels with the irritable Pope; and had, even after his coronation, thrown in a rival, and placed the greater part of Upper Germany in the hands of Frederic of Sicily. Otho, therefore, thirsted for vengeance; and the proposal of a general confederacy against the French monarch but fulfilled his hopes and anticipated his efforts.

Ferrand, Count of Flanders, was not less easily won to join the coalition. One of the greatest vassals of the crown of France, with territories more extensive than the royal domain itself, he had ever been jealous of Philip's increasing power, and had, by many a breach of his feudal duties, endeavoured to loosen the tie that bound him to his sovereign. By the example of John, however, he now began to see that such breach of duty would not pass unpunished. Views of ambition, too, joined themselves to hatred and fear. He saw prospects of independence, of sovereignty and immense territorial aggrandisement, as the infallible consequence of Philip's overthrow; and he therefore was one of the first to put his name to the confederation. So great an alliance once established, thousands of minor princes joined themselves to it, eager to share the spoil. The Dukes of Brabant and Lemburgh, the Counts of Holland, Namur, and Boulogne, whether vassals of the King of France or not, all found some motive to unite against him, and some excuse to their own conscience, for throwing off the homage they had vowed.

In the meantime, the disaffection of Philip's vassals in the heart of his kingdom was great and increasing. The immense strides which the monarchical power had taken under his guidance; the very vast increase of authority they had themselves cast into his hands by their judgment against John; the extensive augmentation of absolute domain, which his prompt and successful execution of that judgment had given him, made each baron tremble for his own power; while, at the same time, Philip's protection of the communes, his interference in matters of justice and general right, and the appeal he granted in his court as supreme lord against the decisions of his great vassals, made each also tremble for the stability of the feudal system itself.

John took care to encourage discontent and apprehension. A thousand rumours were spread concerning Philip's views and intentions. Some declared that his ambitious mind would never be at peace till he had re-established the empire of Charlemagne —till he had broken the power of the barons, and wrested from their hands the administration of justice in their territories. Some said that his plans were already formed for throwing down their strongholds, and possessing himself of their lands; and there was not, in fact, a report, however extravagant, that could irritate the fears and jealousies of the nobles of France against their King, that was not cunningly devised, and industriously circulated.

Some believed, and some pretended to believe; and nothing was heard of, from all parts of the kingdom, but preparations for revolt.

In the meanwhile, Philip was, as we have already shown, steadily pursuing his operations against John, the more anxious for success, because he knew that one defeat would at once call the storm upon his head. He suffered himself not to be turned from the business he had in hand by threatenings of any kind, having secured what he considered sufficient support amongst his barons to repel his external enemies and punish internal rebellion. He saw too, with that keen sagacity which was one of his peculiar qualities, that passions were beginning to mingle themselves in the confederacy of his enemies, which would in time weaken their efforts, if not disunite them entirely. These passions were not those doubts and jealousies of each other, which so often overthrow the noblest alliances; but rather that wild and eager grasping after the vast and important changes which can only be brought about by the operation of many slow and concentring causes.

The designs of the confederates spread as they found their powers increase. Their first object had been but to make war upon Philip Augustus. Perhaps even the original proposal extended but to curb his authority, and reduce him to the same position with his predecessors. Gradually, however, they determined to cast him and his race from the throne; and, calculating upon the certainty of success, they proceeded by treaty to divide his dominions amongst them. Otho was assigned his part, John his, and Ferrand of Flanders claimed Paris and all the adjacent territory for himself. All laws and customs established by Philip were to be done away, and the feudal system restored, as it had been seen a century and a half before. Various other changes were determined upon; but that which was principally calculated to destroy their alliance, was the resolution to attack the power of the church, and to divide its domains amongst the barons and the knights.

John had felt the lash of a papal censure; and, though the ecclesiastical authority had been exercised for the purpose of raising Otho to the imperial throne, he also had since experienced the weight of the church's domination, and had become inimical to the sway by which he had been formerly supported. Nothing then was spoken of less than reducing the power of Rome, and seizing on the luxurious wealth of the clergy.

Innocent the Pope heard and trembled; and, though he the very first had laid the basis of the confederacy against the French monarch, he now saw consequences beyond it, that made him use every effort to stop it in its career; but it was in vain. The hatreds he raised up against Philip in his own dominions — the fears he had excited, and the jealousies he had stimulated, were now producing their fruits; and a bitter harvest they promised against himself. At the same time, as he contemplated the approaching struggle, which was hurrying on with inconceivable rapidity to its climax, he beheld nothing but danger from whatever party might prove victorious. Over the King of France, however, he fancied he had some check, so long as the question of his divorce remained undecided, and consequently the usual doubts and hesitations of the church of Rome were prolonged even beyond their ordinary measure of delay.

The confederation had not been so silent in its movements but that the report thereof had reached the ears of Philip Augustus. Care had been taken, however, that the immediate preparations should be made as privately as possible, so that the first intimation that the troops of the coalition were actually in the field against him, was given by the movement of the Earl of Salisbury upon Flanders.

After that moment, however, "post after post came thick as hail," announcing the various motions of the allies. A hundred and fifty thousand men, of all nations and arms, were already assembled on the banks of the Scheld. John of England was in arms in Poitou; and more than twenty strong places had submitted to him without a stroke. Otho's imperial banner was given to the wind; and fresh thousands were flocking to it every hour, as if his very Gothic name had called together the myriads of the North to a fresh invasion of the more civilised world.

At the same time, revolt and disaffection were manifest through every district of Languedoc; and some of the nearest relations and oldest friends of the French monarch swelled the ranks of his enemies. Such were the tidings that every courier brought; and such were the forces that threatened to overwhelm the kingdom of France and overthrow its throne.

It would be vain to say that Philip Augustus saw such a mighty combination against him without alarm; but it was not the alarm of a weak and feeble mind, which yields to difficulties, or shrinks from danger. No sooner did he hear the extent to which his enemies' preparations had been carried—an extent which he had not fully anticipated—than he issued his charter, convoking the *ban* and *arrière ban* of France to meet at Soissons, and calling to his aid all good men and true throughout his dominions.

Though far inferior in number to his enemies, the force he mustered was anything but insignificant. Then appeared the gratitude of the communes towards the King who had enfranchised them. By their charters they were bound to furnish a certain number of armed men in times of need; but on this occasion there is every reason to believe that they far exceeded their quota.

Nor were the nobles and the knights a few who presented themselves at the *monstre* at Soissons. Seldom had France shown so brilliant a display of chivalry; and even their inferiority of number was more than compensated by their zeal and their renown in arms.

First passed before the monarch, as he sat on his battle-horse surrounded by the troops of his own domains, his faithful vassal, Eudes, Duke of Burgundy, followed by all his vassals, vavassours and knights, with a long train of many thousand archers and men-at-arms from all the vast lands of his kingly dukedom.

Next came Thibalt of Champagne, yet in his green youth, but accompanied by his uncle Philip, and a contingent of knights and soldiers that was an army in itself. Then succeeded the Counts of Dreux, Auxerre, Ponthieu, and St. Paul, each with a long train of men-at-arms. De Coucy leading the troops of Tankerville, the Lords of Montmorency, of Malvoisin, St. Valary, Marciul, and Roye, with the Viscount of Melun, and the famous Guillaume des Barres, followed after; while the troops willingly raised by the clergy, and the long trains of archers and men-at-arms furnished by the free cities, completed the line, and formed an army of more than eighty thousand men, all bedecked with glittering banners and dancing plumes, which gave the whole that air of splendour and pageant which excites enthusiasm and stimulates hope.

The King's eyes lightened with joy as he looked upon them; and conscious of his own great powers of mind to lead to the best effect the noble host before him, he no longer doubted of victory.

"Now," said he, in his own breast, as he thought of all that the last few years had brought—the humiliation that the Pope had inflicted on him—the agony of his parting from Agnes—the vow that had been extorted from him not to see her till the council had pronounced upon his divorce, if its sentence should be given within six months—the long delays of the church of Rome, which had now nearly protracted its deliberations beyond that period—the treason which the proceedings of Innocent had stirred up amongst his vassals, mingled with the memory of torn affections and many bitter injuries—"now! it shall be my turn to triumph. Agnes! I will soon be thine, or in the grave! and let me see the man, prelate or prince, who, when I have once more clasped thy hand in mine, shall dare to pluck it thence! Now, now!" he murmured,—"now the turn is mine!"

Detaching a part of his new-raised army to keep in check the forces of King John in Poitou, Philip Augustus, without a moment's delay, marched to meet the chief body of the confederates in Flanders.

All the horrors of a great and bloody warfare soon followed the bodies of plunderers and adventurers that went before the army, burning, pillaging, and destroying everything, as they advanced beyond the immediate territories of the King. Nothing was beheld as the army advanced, but smoking ruins, devastated fields, and the dead bodies of women and children, mingled with the half-consumed carcasses of cattle, and the broken implements of industry and domestic comfort. It was a piteous and sad sight to see all the pleasant dwellings of a land laid waste, the hopes of the year's labour all destroyed; and the busy human emmets, that had there toiled and joyed, swept away as if the wing of a pestilence had brushed the face of the earth, or lying murdered on their desolate hearths.

Philip Augustus, more refined than his age, strove to soften the rigours of warfare by many a proclamation against all useless violence; but in that day such proclamations were in vain; and the very unsheathing of war's flaming sword scorched up the land before it struck.

In the meanwhile, the Imperial forces, now swelled to more than two hundred thousand men, marched eagerly to meet the King, and about the same time each army arrived within a few miles of Tournay.

Both chieftains longed for a battle, yet the ardour of Philip's forces was somewhat slackened since their departure from Soissons. Ferrand of Flanders and his confederates had contrived, with infinite art, to seduce some of the followers of the French monarch, and to spread doubt and suspicion over many others; so that Philip's reliance was shaken in his troops, and most of the leaders divided amongst themselves.

Such continued the doubtful state of the royal army when Philip arrived at Tournay, and heard that the Emperor, with all his forces, was encamped at the village of Mortain, within ten miles of the city; but still the King resolved to stake all upon a battle; for, though his troops were inferior, he felt that his own superior mind was a host; and he saw that, if the disaffection which was reported, really existed amongst his barons, delay would but increase it in a tenfold degree.

The evening had come, all his preparations were over, he had summoned his barons to council in an hour; and, sitting in a large chamber of the old castle of Tournay, Philip had given order that he should not be disturbed.

He felt, as it were, a thirst for calm and tranquil thought. The last few months of his existence had been given up to all the energy of action; his reflections had been nothing but eternal calculation—the combination of his own movements—the anticipation of his enemy's—plans of battle and policy; and all the thousand momentary anxieties that press upon the general of a large and ill-organized army. He had thought deeply and continually, it is true; but he had not time for thoughts of that grand and extensive nature that raise and dignify the mind every time they are indulged. Though Agnes, too, was still the secret object that gave life and movement to all his energies—though he loved her still with that deep, powerful love that is seldom permitted to share the heart with ambition—though she, in fact, was his ambition's object, and though the battle to which he strode would, if won, place in his hands such power, that none should dare to hold her from him—yet he had scarcely hitherto had an instant to bestow on those calmer, sweeter, gentler ideas, where feeling mingles with reflection, and relieves the mind from petty calculation and workday cares. There are surely two distinct parts linked together in the human soul—feeling and thought:—the thought, that receives, that separates, that investigates, that combines;—the feeling, that hopes, that wishes, that enjoys, that creates.

Philip Augustus, however, felt a thirst for that calm reflection, wherein feeling has the greater share; and, covering his eyes with his hands, he now abandoned himself to it altogether. The coming day was to be a day of bloodshed and of strife,—a day that was to hurl him from a throne, or to crown him with immortal renown,—to leave him a corpse on the cold field of battle, or to increase his power and glory, and restore him to Agnes. He thought of it long and deeply. He thought of what would be

Agnes' grief if she heard that her husband, that her lover had fallen before his enemies; and he wrung his own heart by picturing the agony of hers. Then again came brighter visions. Hope rose up and grew into expectation; and he fancied what would be her joy, when, crowned with the laurel of victory, and scoffing to shame the impotent thunder of the Roman church, he should clasp her once more in his arms, and bid her tread upon the necks of her enemies. Ambition perhaps had its share in his breast, and his thoughts might run on to conquest yet to come, and to mighty schemes of polity and aggrandisement; but still Agnes had therein a share. In the chariot of victory, or on the imperial throne, imagination always placed her by his side.

His dream was interrupted by a quick step, and the words, "My lord!" and, uncovering his eyes, he beheld Guerin advancing from behind the tapestry that fell over the door.

"What now, Guerin?" cried the King, somewhat impatiently. "What now?"

"My lord," replied the minister, "I would not have intruded, but that I have just seen a fellow, who brings tidings from the enemy's camp, of such importance, I judged that you would willingly give ear to it yourself."

"Knowest thou the man?" demanded Philip: "I love not spies."

"I cannot say with any certainty, that I have before seen him, sire," replied Guerin, "though I have some remembrance of his face. He says, however, that he was foot-servant to Prince Arthur, who hired him at Tours; and he gives so clear an account of the taking of Mirebeau, and the subsequent disasters, that there is little doubt of his tale. He says, moreover, that, being taken there with the rest, Lord Salisbury has kept him with him since, to dress one of his horses; till, finding himself so near the royal army, he made his escape like a true man."

"Admit him," said the King: "his tale is a likely one."

Guerin retired for a moment; and then returned, with a bony, powerful man, whose short cut hair, long beard, and mustachoes, offered so different an appearance to the face of anything like a Frenchman in those days, that Philip gazed on him with some doubts.

"How, fellow!" cried he; "thou art surely some Polack, no true Frenchman, with thy beard like a hermit's, and thy hair like a hedgehog."

The man's tongue, however, at once showed that he claimed France for his country justly; and his singular appearance he accounted for, by saying it was a whim of the Earl of Salisbury.

"Answer me, then," said the King, looking upon him somewhat sternly. "Where were your tents pitched in the enemy's camp?—You will find I know their forces as well as you; and if you deceive me, you die."

"The tents of the Earl of Salisbury are pitched between those of the Count of Holland and the troops of the Emperor, so please you, sire," replied the man, boldly. "I came to tell you the truth, not to deceive you."

"You have spoken truth in one thing, at least," replied the monarch. "One more question," he continued, looking at some notes on the table,—"one more question, and thou shalt tell thy tale thy own way. What troops lie behind those of the Duke of Brabant, and what are their number?"

"The next tents to those of the Duke of Brabant," replied the man, "are those of the Duke of Lorraine, amounting, they say in the camp, to nine hundred knights and seven thousand men-at-arms."

"Thou art right in the position, fellow, and nearly right in the number," replied the King, "therefore will I believe thee. Now repeat the news that you gave to that good knight."

"May it please you, sire," replied the man, with a degree of boldness that amounted almost to affectation, "late last night, a council was held in the tent of the Emperor; and the Earl of Salisbury chose me to hold his horse near the entrance of the tent,—for he is as proud an Englishman as ever buckled on spurs; and, though all the other princes contented themselves with leaving their horses on the outside of the second guard, he must needs ride to the very door of the tent, and have his horse held there till he came out."

"By my faith! 'tis like their island pride!" said the King. "Each Englishman fancies himself equal to a prince. But proceed with thy tale, and be quick, for the hour of the council approaches."

"My story is a very short one, sire," replied the man, "for it was but little I heard. However, after they had spoken within the tent for some time in a low voice, the Emperor's tongue sounded very loud, as if some one had opposed him; and I heard him say, 'He will march against us, whatever be the peril —I know him well; and then, at the narrow passage of Damarets we will cut them off to a man, for Sir Guy de Coucy has promised to embarrass their rear with the men of Tankerville;— and he will keep his word too!' cried the Emperor loudly, as if some one had seemed to doubt it, 'for we have promised him the hand of his lady love, the daughter of Count Julian of the Mount, if we win the victory.'"

"Ha!" cried the King, turning his eyes from the countenance of the informer to that of Guerin,—"ha! this is treason, indeed! Said they aught else, fellow, that you heard?"

"They spoke of there being many traitors in your host, sire," replied the man; "but they named none else but Sir Guy de Coucy; and just then I heard the Earl of Salisbury speak as if he were walking to the mouth of the tent. 'If Philip discovers his treason,' said he, 'he will cut off his head, and then your plan is nought.' Just as he spoke, he came out, and seeing me stand near the tent, he bade me angrily go farther off, so that I heard no more."

"Have Sir Guy de Coucy to prison!" said the King, turning to Guerin. "By the holy rood! we will follow the good Earl of Salisbury's plan, and have one traitor less in the camp!"

As he heard these words, the eyes of the informer sparkled with a degree of joy, that did not escape the keen observing glance of the King; but, wishing to gain more certain knowledge, he thanked him with condescending dignity for the news he had given, and told him to wait amongst the serjeants-of-arms below, till the council should be over, when the chancellor would give him a purse of gold, as a reward for his services. The man with a low reverence retired. "Follow, Guerin," cried Philip, hastily. "Bid some of the serjeants look to him narrowly, but let them treat him well. Lead him to babble, if it be possible. However, on no account let him escape. Have this De Coucy to prison too, though I doubt the tale."

Guerin turned to obey; but, at that moment, the pages from without opened the doors of the chamber, giving entrance to the barons who had been called to the council.

A moment of bustle succeeded; and by the time that Guerin could quit the King, the man who had brought the information we have just heard was gone, and no where to be found.

So suspicious a circumstance induced Guerin to refrain from those strong measures against De Coucy which the King had commanded, till he had communicated with the monarch on the subject. He sent down, however, to the young knight's quarters, to require his presence at the castle on business of import; when the answer returned by his squires was, that De Coucy himself, his squire Hugo de Barre, who had by this time been ransomed by his lord, his page, and a small party of lances, had been absent ever since the encampment had been completed, and no one knew whither they had gone.

Guerin knit his brows; for he would have staked much upon De Coucy's honour; but yet, his absence at so critical a moment was difficult to be accounted for. He returned to Philip instantly, and found the council still in deliberation; some of its members being of opinion that it would be better to march directly forward upon Mortain, and attack the enemy without loss of time; and others, again, strongly counselling retreat upon Peronne.

Many weighty arguments had been produced on both sides, and at the moment Guerin entered, a degree of silence had taken place previous to the King's pronouncing his final decision. Guerin, however, approached the monarch, and bending beside him, informed him, in a low voice, of what he had just heard.

The King listened, knitting his brows and fixing his eyes upon the table, till Guerin had concluded; then raising his head, and thinking for a moment, without taking any immediate notice of what the minister had said, he announced his decision on the point before the council.

"Noble lords," said he, "we have heard and weighed your opinions upon the conduct of the war; but various circumstances will induce us, in some degree, to modify both, or, rather, to take a medium between them. If we advance upon the enemy at Mortain, we expose ourselves to immense disadvantage in the narrow passage by Damarets. This consideration opposes itself on the one hand; and on the other, it must never be said that Philip of France fled before his enemies, when supported by so many true and faithful peers as we see around us here;" and the monarch glanced his eagle eye rapidly from face to face, with a look which, without evincing doubt, gathered at once the expression of each as he spoke. "Our determination therefore is, early to-morrow morning to march, as if towards Lille; and the next day, wheeling through the open plains of that country, to take the enemy on their flank, before they are aware of our designs. By dawn, therefore, I pray ye, noble peers, have your men all arrayed beneath your banners, and we will march against our enemy; who, be assured, whatever fair promises he holds out, is not alone the enemy of Philip, but of every true Frenchman. You are fighting for your hearths and for your homes; and where is the man who will not strike boldly in such a quarrel? For to-night, lords, adieu! To-morrow we will meet you with the first ray of the sun."

With these words the council broke up, and the barons took their leave and withdrew; some well contented with the King's plan, some murmuring that their opinion had not been considered of weight, and some perhaps disappointed with a scheme that threatened failure to the very confederacy against which they appeared in arms.

"'Tis strange, Guerin! 'tis strange!" cried the King, as soon as his peers were gone,—"we have traitors amongst us, I fear! —yet I will not believe that De Coucy is false. His absence is unaccountable; but, depend on it, there is some good cause; —and yet that groom's tale against him! 'Tis strange! I doubt some of the faces, too, that I have seen but now. But I will try them, Guerin—I will try them: and if they be traitors, they shall damn themselves to hell!"

As the King had commanded, with the first ray of the sun the host was under arms; and stretching out in a long line under the walls of Tournay, it offered a gay and splendid sight, with the horizontal beams of the early morning shining bright on a thousand banners, and flashing back from ten thousand lances.

The marshals had scarcely arrayed it five minutes, when the King, followed by his glittering train, issued forth from the castle, mounted on a superb black charger, and armed cap-à-pié. He rode slowly from one end of the line to the other, bowing his plumed helmet in answer to the shouts and acclamations of the troops, and then returned to the very centre of the host. Circling round the crest of his casque were seen the fleurs de lis of the crown of France; and it was remarked, that behind him two of his attendants carried an immense golden wine-cup, called a hanap, and a sharp naked sword.

In the centre of the line the King paused, and opened the volant piece of his helmet,* when his face might be seen by every one, calm, proud, and dignified. At a sign from the monarch, two priests approached, carrying a large silver cruise and a small loaf of bread, which Philip received from their hands; and, cutting the bread into pieces with the edge of the sword carried by his attendant, he placed the pieces in the chalice, and then poured it full of wine.

"Barons of France!" cried he, in a loud voice, which made itself heard to an immense distance,—"Barons of France! Some foul liar last night sent me word, that there were traitors in my council and rebels in my host. Here I stand before you all, bearing on my casque the crown of France; and if amongst you there be one man who judges me unworthy to wear that crown, instantly let him separate from my people and depart to my enemies. He shall go free and unscathed, with his arms and followers, on the honour of a king! But those noble barons who are willing to fight and die with their sovereign, in defence of their wives, their children, their homes, and their country—let them come forward; and in union with their King, eat this consecrated bread, and taste this sacred wine; and cursed be he who shall hereafter forget this sign of unity and fellowship!"

A loud shout from the whole host was the first reply; and then each baron, without an exception, hurried forward before the ranks, and claimed to pledge himself as Philip had proposed.

In the midst of the ceremony, however, a tall, strong man in black armour, pushed his way through the rest, exclaiming—"Give me the cup! give me the cup!"

When it was placed in his hands, he raised it first to his head, without unclosing the visor of his helmet; but, finding his mistake, he unclasped the volant hurriedly, and throwing it back, discovered the wild countenance of Count Thibalt d'Auvergne. He then raised again the cup, and with a quick but not ungraceful movement, bowed low to Philip, and drank some of the wine.

"Philip, King of France, I am yours till death," he said, when he had drunk; and after gazing for a few moments earnestly in the King's face, he turned his horse and galloped back to a large body of lances, a little in the rear of the line.

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* About this period the aventaille came into general use.

"Unhappy man!" said the King; and turning to Guerin, he added—"Let him be looked to, Guerin. See who is with him."

On sending to inquire, however, it was replied, that the Count d'Anvergne was there with his vassals and followers, to serve his sovereign, Philip Augustus, in his wars, as a true and faithful liegeman.

Satisfied, therefore, that he was under good and careful guidance, the King turned his thoughts back to other subjects; and, having briefly thanked his barons for their ready zeal, commanded the army to begin its march upon Lille.

CHAPTER XLI.

Between Mortain and Tournay, in a small road with high banks on either side, the shrubs and flowers of which were covered with a thick coating of dust, rode two of our old acquaintances, on the same morning that the review we have just described took place in the army of the King.

The first, armed in haubergeon and casque, with his haussecol, or gorget, hiding his long beard, and his helmet covering his short cut hair, it was no longer difficult to recognise as Jodelle, the Brabançois, whom we saw last in an assumed character before Philip Augustus. By his side, more gaudily costumed than ever, with a long peacock's feather ornamenting his black cap, rode Gallon the fool.

Though two persons of such respectability might well have pretended to some attendants, they were alone; and Jodelle, who seemed in some haste, and not particularly pleased with his companion's society, was pricking on at a sharp pace. But Gallon's mare, on which he was once more mounted, had been trained by himself, and ambled after the coterel's horse, with a sweet sort of pertinacity from which there was no escaping.

"Why follow you me, fool, devil?" cried the Brabançois.—

"Get thee gone! We shall meet again. Fear not! I am in haste; and, my curse upon those idiot Saxons that let you go, when I charged them to keep you, after you hunted me all the way from your camp to ours last night."

"Haw, haw!" cried Gallon, showing all his white sharp teeth to the very back, as he grinned at Jodelle;—"haw, haw! thou art ungrateful, sire Jodelle.—Haw, haw! to think of a coterel being ungrateful! Did not I let thee into all De Coucy's secrets two days ago? Did not I save thy neck from the hangman five months ago? And now, thou ungrateful hound, thou grudgest me thy sweet company.—Haw, haw! I that love thee,—haw, haw, haw! I that enjoy thy delectable society!—Haw, haw! Haw, haw! Haw, haw!" and he rolled and shouted with laughter, as if the very idea of any one loving the Brabançois was sufficient to furnish the whole world with mirth. "So, thou toldest thy brute Saxons to keep me, or hang me, or burn me alive, if they would, last night—ay, and my bonny mare too; saying, it was as great devil as myself, Haw, haw! maître Jodelle! They told me all. But they fell in love with my phiz; and let me go, all for the sweetness of my countenance. Who can resist my wondrous charms?" and he contorted his features into a form that left them the likeness of nothing human. "But I'll plague thee!" he continued; "I'll never leave thee till I see what thou dost with that packet in thy bosom.—Haw, haw! I'll teaze thee! I have plagued the Coucy enough, for a blow he gave me one day. Haw, haw! that I have! Now, methinks, I'll have done with that, and do him some good service."

"Thou'lt never serve him more, fool!" cried Jodelle, his eyes gleaming with sanguinary satisfaction; "I have paid him, too, for the blow he gave me—and for more things than that! His head is off by this time, juggler! I heard the order given myself—ay, and I caused that order. Ha! canst thou do a feat like that?"

"Haw, haw! Haw, haw, haw!" screamed Gallon, wriggling his snout hither and thither, and holding his sides with laughter.

"Haw, haw! thou dolt! thou ass! thou block! thou stump of an old tree! By the Lord! thou must be a wit after all, to invent such a piece of uncommon stupidity.—Haw, haw, haw! Haw, haw! Didst thou think that I would have furnished thee with a good tale against the Coucy, and given thee means of speech with the chancellor himself, without taking care to get the cow-killing, hammer-fisted homicide out of the way first?—Haw, haw! thou idiot. Haw, haw, haw! — Lord! what an ass a coterel is!—Haw, haw, haw!"

"Not such an ass as thou dreamest, fiend!" muttered Jodelle, setting his teeth close, and almost resolved to aim a blow with his dagger at the juggler as he rode beside him. But Gallon had always one of his eyes, at least, fixed upon his companion; and, in truth, Jodelle had seen so much of his extraordinary activity and strength, that he held Gallon in some dread, and scarcely dared to close with him in fair and equal fight. He had smothered his vengeance for long, however, and he had no inclination to delay it much longer, as the worthy Brabançois had more reasons than one for resolving to rid himself of the society of a person so little trustworthy as Gallon, in the most summary manner possible—but the only question was how to take him at a disadvantage.

For this purpose, it seemed necessary to cover every appearance of wrath, that the juggler might be thrown off his guard. Jodelle smoothed his brow, therefore, and, after a moment, affected to join in Gallon's laugh. "Thou art a cunning dealer!" said he—"thou art a cunning dealer, sir Gallon! But, in troth, I should like to know how thou didst contrive to beguile this De Coucy away from the army, as thou sayest, at such a moment."

"Haw, haw!" cried Gallon—"haw, haw! 'Twas no hard work. How dost thou catch a sparrow, sire Jodelle? Is it not by spreading out some crumbs? Well, by the holy rood! as he says himself, I sent him a goose's errand all the way down the river, to reconnoitre a party of men whom I made Ermold the page, make Hugo the squire, make Coucy the knight, believe were going to take the King's host on the flank!—Haw, haw! Oh rare!"

"By St. Peter! thou hast betrayed what I told thee when we were drinking two nights since," cried Jodelle. "Fool! thou wilt have my dagger in thee if thou heedest not!"

"Oh rare!" shouted Gallon, "oh rare! What then, did I tell the Coucy true, when I said Count Julian of the Mount, and William de la Roche Guyon, were there with ten thousand men? Haw, haw! did I tell him true, coterel? Talk not to me of daggers, lout, or I'll drive mine in under thy fifth rib, and leave thee as dead as a horse's bones on a common. Haw, haw!

I thought the Coucy would have gone down with all the men of Tankerville, and have chined me that fair-faced coward, that once fingered this great monument of my beauty;" and he laid his finger on his long unnatural snout, with so mingled an expression of face, that it was difficult to decide whether he spoke in vanity or mockery. "But he only went down to reconnoitre," added the juggler. "The great ninny! he might have swallowed father and lover up at a mouthful, and then married the heiress if he liked! And he calls me fool, too! Oh rare!—But where art thou going, beau sire Jodelle? I saw all your army a-foot before I left them to come after you; and I dreamed that they were going to cut off the King at the passage of Bovines; and doubtless thou art bearer of an order to Sir Julian, and Count William, with the Duke of Limburg and the men of Ardennes, to take him in the rear. Haw, haw! there will be fine smashing of bones, and hacking of flesh. I must be there to have the picking of the dead men."

Thus ran on Gallon, rambling from subject to subject, but withal betraying so clear a knowledge of all the plans of the imperial army, that Jodelle believed his information to be little less than magical; though indeed Gallon was indebted for it to strolling amongst the tents of the Germans the night before, and catching here and there, while he amused the knights and squires with his tricks of *jonglerie*, all the rumours that were afloat concerning the movements of the next day. From these, with a happiness that madness sometimes has, he jumped at conclusions, which many a wiser brain would have missed, and, like a blind man stumbling on a treasure, hit by accident upon the exact truth.

As his conversation with Jodelle arrived at this particular point, the road which they were pursuing opened out upon a little irregular piece of ground, bisected by another by-path, equally ornamented by high rough banks. Nevertheless, neither of these roads traversed the centre of the little green or common; the one which the travellers were pursuing skirting along the side, under the sort of cliff by which it was flanked, and the other edging the opposite extreme. At the intersection of the paths, however, on the very top of the farther bank, stood a tall elm tree, which Gallon measured with his eye as they approached.

"Haw, haw!" cried he, delighting in every recollection that might prove unpleasant to his neighbours—"Haw, haw! Beau sire Jodelle! Monstrous like the tree on which they were going to hang you, near the Pont de l'Arche! Haw, haw, haw! The time when you were like to be hanged, and I saved you—you remember?"

"Thou didst not save me, fool!" replied the Brabançois· "'twas King John saved me. I would not owe my life to such a foul fool as thou art, for all that it is worth. The King saved my life to do a great deed of vengeance, which I will accomplish yet before I die," added Jodelle, "and then I'll account with him too, for what I owe *him*—he shall not be forgotten! no, no!" and the plunderer's eyes gleamed as he thought of the fate that the faithless monarch had appointed for him, and connected it with the vague schemes of vengeance that were floating through his own brain.

"Haw, haw!" cried Gallon. "If thou goest not to hell, sire Jodelle, thou art sure 'twill not be for lack of thanklessness, to back your fair bevy of gentlemanly vices. John, the gentle, sent thee thy pardon, that thou mightest murder De Coucy for prating of his murdering Arthur,—I know that as well as thou dost; but had my tongue not been quicker than his messenger's horse, thou wouldst soon have been farther on your road to heaven than ever you may be again. Oh rare! How the crows of the Pont de l'Arche must hate me! Haw, haw! vinegar face! didst ever turn milk sour with thy sharp nose?—Hark! Hear you not a distant clatter? Your army is marching down towards the bridge, prince Pumpkin," he rambled on; "I'll up into yon tree, and see; for this country is as flat as pease porridge."

So saying, Gallon sprang to the ground, climbed the bank in an instant, and walked up the straight boll of the tree, as easily as if he had been furnished with a ladder; giving a quick glance round, however, every step, to see that Jodelle did not take any advantage of him.

His movements had been so rapid, that with the best intentions thereunto in the world, the coterel could not have injured him in his ascent; and when he was once up, he began to question him as to what he saw.

"What do I see?" said Gallon. "Why, when I look that way, I see German asses, and Lorraine foxes, and English curs, and Flanders mules, all marching down towards the river as quietly as may be; and when I look the other way, I perceive a whole band of French monkeys, tripping on gaily without seeing the others; and when I look down there," he continued, pointing to Jodelle, "I see a Provençal wolf, hungry for plunder, and thirsty for blood;" and Gallon began to descend the tree.

As he had spoken, there was a sound of horses heard coming up the road, and Jodelle spurred close up under the bank, as if to catch a glance of the persons who were approaching; but, at the same moment, he quietly drew his sword. Gallon instantly perceived his manœuvre, and attempted to spring up the tree once more.

Ere he could do so, however, Jodelle struck at him; and though he could only reach high enough to wound the tendon of his leg, the pain made the juggler let go his hold, and he fell to the top of the bank, nearly on a level with the face of the coterel, who, rising in his stirrups, with the full lunge of his arm, plunged his sword into his body.

Though mortally wounded, Gallon, without word or groan, rolled down the bank, and clung to the legs of his enemy's horse, impeding the motions of the animal as much as if it had been clogged. At the same time Jodelle urged it furiously with the spur; for the sound of coming cavaliers, and the glance of a knight's pennon from behind the turn of the road, at about an hundred yards' distance, showed him that he must either ride on, or take the risk of the party being inimical to his own.

Three times the horse, plunging furiously under the spur, set its feet full on the body of the unfortunate juggler; but still he kept his hold, without speech or outcry, till suddenly shouting, "Haw, haw!—Haw, haw, haw!—The Coucy! the Coucy! Haw, haw!" he let go his hold; and the coterel galloped on at full speed, ascertaining by a single glance, that Gallon's shout announced nothing but the truth.

De Coucy's eyes were quick, however; and his horse far fleeter than that of the coterel. He saw Jodelle, and recognised him instantly; while the dying form of Gallon, and the blood that stained the dry white sand of the road, in dark red patches round about, told their own tale, and were not to be mistaken. Without pausing to clasp his visor, or to brace his shield, the knight snatched his lance from his squire, struck his spurs into the flanks of his charger, and, before Jodelle had reached the other side of the little green, the iron of the spear struck him between the shoulders, and, passing through his plastron as if it had been made of parchment, hurled him from his horse, never to mount again. A shrill cry like that of a wounded vulture, as the knight struck him, and a deep groan as he fell to the ground, were the only sounds that the plunderer uttered more. De Coucy tugged at his lance for a moment, endeavouring to shake it free from the body; but, finding that he could not do so without dismounting, he left it in the hands of his squire, and returned to the spot where Gallon the fool still lay, surrounded by part of the young knight's train.

"Coucy, Coucy!" cried the dying juggler, in a faint voice, "Gallon is going on the long journey! Come hither, and speak to him before he sets out!"

The young knight put his foot to the ground, and came close up to his wounded follower, who gazed on him with wistful eyes, in which shone the first glance of affection, perhaps, that ever he had bestowed on mortal man.

"I am sorry to leave thee, Coucy!" said he, "I am sorry to leave thee, now it comes to this. I love thee better than I thought. Give me thy hand."

De Coucy spoke a few words of kindness to him, and let him take his hand, which he carried feebly to his lips, and licked it like a dying dog.

"I have spited you very often, Coucy," said the juggler; "and do you know I am sorry for it now, for you have been kinder to me than any one else. Will you forgive me?"

"Yes, my poor Gallon," replied the knight: "I know of no great evil thou hast done; and even if thou hast, I forgive thee from my heart."

"Heaven bless thee for it!" said Gallon.—"Heaven bless thee for it!—But hark thee, De Coucy! I will do thee one good turn before I die. Give me some wine out of thy *botiau*, mad Ermold the page, and I will tell the Coucy where I have wronged him, and where he may right himself. Give me some wine, quick, for my horse is jogging to the other world."

Ermold, as he was desired, put the leathern bottle, which every one travelled with in those days, to the lips of the dying man; who, after a long draught, proceeded with his confession. We will pass over many a trick which he acknowledged to have played his lord in the Holy Land, at Constantinople, and in Italy, always demanding between each, "Can you forgive me now?" De Coucy's heart was not one to refuse pardon to a dying man; and Gallon proceeded to speak of the deceit he had put upon him concerning the lands of the Count de Tankerville. "It was all false together," said he. "The Vidame of Besançon told me to tell you, that his friend, the Count de Tankerville, had sent a charter to be kept in the King's hands, giving you all his feofs; and now, when he sees you with the army, commanding the men of Tankerville, the Vidame thinks that you are commanding them by your own right, not out of the good will of the King. Besides, he told me, he did not know whether your uncle was dead or not; but that Bernard, the hermit of Vincennes, could inform you."

"But why did you not——?" demanded De Coucy.

"Ask me no questions, Coucy," cried Gallon; "I have but little breath left; and that must go to tell you something more important still. From the top of yon tree I saw the King marching down to the bridge at Bovines; and, without his knowing it, the enemy are marching after him. If he gets half over, he is lost. I heard Henry of Brabant last night say, that they would send a plan of their battle to the Duke of Limburg, Count Julian, and William de la Roche Guyon, whose troops I sent you after, down the river. He said too," proceeded Gallon, growing apparently fainter as he spoke,—"he said too, that it was to be carried by one who well knew the French camp. Oh, Coucy! my breath fails me. Jodelle, the coterel—he is the man, I am sure—the papers are on him.—But, Coucy! Coucy!" he continued, gasping for breath, and holding the knight with a sort of convulsive grasp, as he saw him turning to seek the important packet he mentioned,—"do not go, Coucy! do not go to the camp—they think you a traitor.—Oh, how dim my eyes grow!—They will have your head off—don't go—you'll be of no use with your head off—Haw, haw! haw, haw!" And with a faint effort at his old wild laugh, Gallon the fool gave one or two sharp shudders, and yielded the spirit, still holding De Coucy tight by the arm.

"He is gone!" said the knight, disengaging himself from his grasp. "Our army marching upon Bovines!" continued he: "can it be true?" They were not to quit Tournay for two days.—Up, Ermold, into that tree, and see whether you can gain any sight of them. Quick! for we must spur hard, if it be true.—You, Hugo, search the body of the coterel.—Quick, Ermold—hold by that branch—there, your foot on the other! See you anything now?"

With some difficulty, Ermold de Marcy, though an active youth, had climbed half-way up the tree which Gallon had sprung up like a squirrel; and now, holding round it with both legs and arms, he gazed out over the far prospect. "I see spears," cried he,—"I see spears marching on by the river—and I can see the bridge too!"

"Are there any men on it?" cried De Coucy:—"how far is it from the foremost spears?"

"It is clear yet!" replied the page; "but the lances in the van are not half a mile from it!"

"Look to the right!—look to the right!" cried the knight; "towards Mortain, what see you?"

"I see a clump or two of spears," replied the youth, "scattered here and there; but over one part, where seems a valley, there rises a cloud;—it may be the morning mist—it may be dust:—stay, I will climb higher;" and he contrived to reach two or three branches above. "Lances, as I live!" cried he: "I see the steel heads glittering through the cloud of dust, and moving on, just above the place where the hill cuts them. They are rising above the slope—now they dip down again—thousands on thousands—never did I see such a host in Christendom or Paynimry!"

"Come down, Ermold, and mount!" cried the knight. "Two of the servants-of-arms, take up yon poor fellow's body!" he continued, "and bear it to the cottage where we watered our horses but now—then follow towards the bridge with all speed. —Now, Hugo, hast thou the packet? 'Tis it, by the holy rood!" he added, taking a sealed paper that the squire had found upon Jodelle. "To horse! to horse! We shall reach the King's host yet, ere the van has passed the bridge. He must fight there or lose all." And followed by the small body of spears that accompanied him, Guy de Coucy spurred on at full gallop towards the bridge of Bovines.

The distance might be about four miles; but ere he had ridden one-half of that way, he came suddenly upon a body of about twenty spears, at the top of a slight rise that concealed each party till they were within fifty yards of the other. "Down with your lances!" cried De Coucy; "France! France! A Coucy! a Coucy!" and in an instant the spears of his followers, to the number of about seventy, were levelled in a long straight row.

"France! France!" echoed the other party; and, riding forward, De Coucy was met in mid space by the Chancellor Guerin,—armed at all points, but bearing the coat and cross of a knight hospitaller—and Adam Viscount de Melun, who had together ridden out from the main body of the army, to ascertain the truth of some vague reports, that the enemy had left Mortain, and was pursuing with all his forces.

"Well met, Sir Guy de Coucy," said Guerin. "By your cry of France but now, I trust you are no traitor to France, though strange accusations against you reached the King last night; and your absence at a moment of danger countenanced them. I have order," he added, "to attach you for treason."

"Whosoever calls me traitor, lies in his teeth," replied the knight rapidly, eager to arrive at the King's host with all speed. "My absence was in the King's service; and as to attaching me for treason, lord bishop," he added, with a smile, "methinks my seventy lances against your twenty will soon cancel your warrant. I dreamed not that the King would think of marching to-day, being Sunday, or I should have returned before. But now, my lord, my errand is to the King himself, and 'tis one also that requires speed. The enemy are following like hounds behind the deer. I have here a plan of their battle. They hope to surprise the King at the passage of the river. He must halt on this side, or all is lost. From that range of low hills, most likely you will see the enemy advancing.—Farewell."

Guerin, who had never for a moment doubted the young knight's innocence, did not of course attempt to stay him, and De Coucy once more galloped on at full speed. He soon began to fall in with stragglers from the different bodies of the royal forces; camp followers, plunderers, skirmishers, pedlars, jugglers, cooks, and all the train of extraneous living lumber attached to an army of the thirteenth century. From these he could gain no certain information of where the King was to be found. Some said he had passed the bridge,—some said he was yet in the rear; and, finding that they were all as ignorant on the subject as himself, the young knight sped on; and passing by several of the thick battalions which were hurrying on through clouds of July dust towards the bridge, he demanded of one of the leaders, where was the King.

"I heard but now, that he was in that green meadow to the right," replied the other knight; "and see!" he added, pointing with his lance, "that may be he, under those ash-trees."

De Coucy turned his eyes in the direction the other pointed, and perceived a group of persons, some on horseback, some on foot, standing round one who, stretched upon the grass, lay resting himself under the shadow of a graceful clump of ash-trees. Close behind him stood a squire, holding a casque in his hand; and another, at a little distance, kept in the ardour of a magnificent battle-horse, which, neighing and pawing the grass, seemed eager to join the phalanx that defiled before him.

It was evidently the King who lay there; and De Coucy, bringing his men to a halt, at the side of the high road, along which the rest were pressing, troop after troop, towards the bridge, spurred on, followed by his squires alone, and rode up to the group at once.

Philip Augustus raised his eyes to De Coucy's face as he came up; and, at a few paces, the young knight sprang from his horse, and casting his rein to Hugo de Barre, approached the monarch.

"My lord," said he, earnestly, as soon as he was within hearing, "I beseech you to order a halt, and command your troops who have passed the bridge to return. The enemy are not half a mile from you; and before half the army can pass, you will be attacked on all sides."

De Coucy spoke rapidly, and the King answered in the same manner. "Sir Guy de Coucy," said he—without rising, however, "you are accused to me of treason. Ought I to listen to counsel from a man in that situation?"

"My lord the King," replied the knight, "God send you many such good *traitors* as I am! There is the enemy's plan of attack;—at least, so I believe, for I have not opened it. You will see by the seal it is from the Duke of Brabant; and by the superscription, that it is to the Duke of Limburgh, together with Count Julian of the Mount, and Count William de la Roche

Guyon, his allies. I reconnoitred their forces last night; they amount to fifteen thousand men; and lie three miles down the river."

The King took the paper, and hastily cut the silk with his dagger. "Halt!" cried he, after glancing his eye over it. "Mareuil de Malvoisin, command a halt!—Ho, Guerin!" he cried, seeing the minister riding quickly towards him, "have you seen the enemy?"

"They are advancing with all speed, sire," shouted the Hospitaller, as he rode up. "For God's sake, sire, call back the troops! They are coming up like the swarms of locusts we have seen in Palestine. Their spears are like corn in August."

"We will reap them," cried Philip, starting up with a triumphant smile upon his lip,—"we will reap them!—To arms! warriors, to arms!" And putting his foot in the stirrup, he stood with his hand upon the horse's neck, turning to those about him, and multiplying his orders with the prompt activity of his keen all-grasping mind. "The oriflamme has passed the bridge; speed to bring it back, Renault.—Hugo, to the Count of St. Pol! bid him return with all haste.—De Coucy, I did you wrong—forget it, and strike this day as you are wont.—Guerin, array the host as we determined. See that the faithful communes be placed in our own battle, but let Arras and Amiens hold the second line. Let the barons and the knights stretch out as far as may be;—remember! every man's own lance and shield must be his safeguard.—Eustace, speed to the Count de Beaumont; bid him re-pass the river at the ford, and take his place at the right.—Now, Guerin, hasten! Let the serjeants of the Soissons begin the battle, that the enemy may be broken ere the knights charge.—Away, De Coucy! Lead Tankerville well, and win the day.—Guillaume de Mortemar, stay by our person."

Such were some of the orders given by Philip Augustus: then springing on his horse, he received his casque, and, raising the visor, sat in silence gazing upon the field, which was clear and open on all sides, except the road, through which the troops were still seen approaching towards the bridge; and which, in the other direction, wound away towards Tournay, through some small woods and valleys that hid the rear guard from view.

In the meanwhile, Guerin, whose long experience as a knight hospitaller, qualified him well to marshal the army, hastened to array all the troops that had yet arrived on the plain, taking care to keep the entrance of the bridge free, that the forces which had already passed and were returning upon their steps, might take up their position without confusion and disarray. At that moment a messenger arrived in breathless haste from the rear of the army, stating that the enemy were already engaged with the light troops of Auxerre, who sustained themselves with difficulty, and demanded help. But even while he spoke, the two bodies engaged issued forth upon the plain; and the spears of the whole imperial army began to bristle over the hills.

The trumpets of the French sounded as their enemies appeared; and it seemed that the Emperor was not a little surprised to find his adversaries so well prepared to meet him.

Whether the unexpected sight of so large a body of troops drawn up to oppose them, embarrassed the confederates and deranged their plans, or whether Philip's first line covering the bridge, they did not perceive that a great part of his forces were still either on the other side of the river, or in the act of repassing it, cannot now be told; but they took no advantage of so favourable a moment for attack. The body engaged with the rear of Philip's army, was called back; and wheeling to the right of the road by which they came, they took up their position on the slope of the hills to the north of the plain, while Philip eagerly seized the opportunity of displaying his forces on the southern side, thus having the eyes of his soldiers turned away from the burning sun, which shone full in the faces of the adverse host. An army commanded by many chiefs is of course never well led; for what may be gained by consultation is ever lost by indecision; and the two great faults thus committed by the confederates were probably owing to the uncertainty of their councils.

However that might be, they suffered Philip greatly to recover the unity of his forces, and to take up the best position on the field; after which succeeded a pause, as if they hesitated to begin the strife, though theirs had been the party to follow and to urge their enemy to a battle, and though they had overtaken him at the precise moment which they had themselves planned, and in which an attack must have proved the most disastrous.

CHAPTER XLII.

For several minutes after the two armies were thus ranged opposite each other, both stood without motion, gazing on the adverse host. The front line was composed almost entirely of cavalry, which formed in those days the great strength of an army, and uniformly decided the event of a battle; but between the long battalions of the knights and men-at-arms were ranged close bodies of cross-bowmen and archers, who waited but a signal to commence the engagement with their missiles.

Standing thus face to face, with but a narrow space between them, the two hosts seemed as if contemplating the glittering array of the field, which, if we may believe the "*branch of royal lineages*," offered on either part as splendid a pageant as ever a royal court exhibited on fête or tournament. "There," it says, in its naif jargon, "you might see many a pleasant coat of arms, and many a neat and gentle device, tissued of gold and various shining colours, blue, vermilion, yellow, and green. There were to be seen serried shields, and neighing horses, and ringing arms, pennons and banners, and helms and glittering crests."

To the left of the imperial army appeared Ferrand, Count of Flanders, with an immense host of hardy Flemings, together with the Count de Boulogne, and several other of the minor confederates; while, opposed to him, were the young Duke of Champagne, the Duke of Burgundy, and the men of the commune of Soissons. To the right of the imperial army was a small body of English, with the Duke of Brabant and his forces, in face of the Comte de Dreux, the Bishop of Beauvais, and a body of the troops of the clergy; while in the centre of each host, and conspicuous to both, were Otho, Emperor of Germany, and Philip Augustus of France, commanding in person the chosen knights of either monarchy.

In the midst of the dark square of lances which surrounded the Emperor was to be seen a splendid car, from the centre of which rose a tall pole, bearing on the top the imperial standard, a golden eagle hovering above a dragon; while, beside Philip Augustus, was borne the royal banner of France,* consisting of an azure field embroidered with fleurs de lis of gold. On either side of the King were ranged the knights selected to attend his person, whom we find named as William des Barres, Barthelmy de Roye, Peter de Malvoisin, Gerard Scropha, Steven of Longchamp, William of Mortemar, John of Rouvrai, William de Garlande, and Henry, Count de Bar, all men distinguished in arms, and chosen for their high and chivalrous qualities.

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* A different banner from the famous oriflamme, which was the standard of St. Denis.

A dead silence pervaded the field. Each host, as we have said, gazed upon the other, still and motionless, waiting in awful expectation the first movement which should begin the horrid scene of carnage about to follow. It wanted but a word—a sign—the levelling of a lance—the sounding of a trumpet, to cast the whole dark mass of bloodthirsty insects there assembled into strife and mutual destruction; but yet there was a pause; as if each monarch felt the dreadful responsibility which that signal would bring upon his head, and hesitated to give it. Some reflections of the kind certainly passed through the mind of Philip Augustus: for, turning to William de Mortemar, he said, "We must begin the fight—I seek not their blood, but God gives us a right to defend ourselves. They have leagued to crush me, and the carnage of this day be upon their head. Where is the oriflamme?" he continued, looking round for the consecrated banner of St. Denis.

"It has not yet repassed the river, sire," replied Gerard Scropha. "I heard the tramp of the communes still coming over the bridge, and filling up the ranks behind. The oriflamme was the first banner that passed, and therefore of course will be the last that returns."

"We must not wait for it, then," said the King. "Henry de Bar, speed to Guerin, who is on the right with the Count de St. Paul; bid them begin the battle by throwing in a few men-at-arms to shake that heavy line of the Flemings. Then let the knights charge."

The young Count bowed low, and set spurs to his horse: but his very passage along the line was a signal for the confederates to commence the fight. A flight of arrows and quarrels instantly darkened the sky, and fell thick as hail amongst the ranks of the French; the trumpets sounded, the lances were levelled, and two of the King's chaplains, who were placed at a little distance behind him, began to sing the hundred and forty-third Psalm, while the tears rolled plentifully from their eyes, from the effects of mingled fear, agitation, and devotion.

In the meanwhile, an hundred and fifty serjeants-of-arms charged the whole force of the Count of Flanders, according to the order of the King. His intention was completely fulfilled.* Dropping the points of their lances, the French men-at-arms cast themselves into the midst of the Flemish knights, who, indignant at being attacked by men who had not received the honours of chivalry, fell upon them furiously, with little regard to their own good order.

In a few moments, the horses of the French men-at-arms were all slain; but being men of the commune of Soissons, trained to fight on foot as well as on horseback, they prolonged the combat hand to hand with the enemy's knights, and completely succeeded in throwing the centre of the imperial left wing into disarray. At that moment, the battalion of knights, under the Count de St. Paul, charged in support of the men-at-arms, and with their long lances levelled in line swept all before them, cleaving through the host of Flemings, and scattering them abroad upon the plain, as a thunderbolt strikes a pine, and rends it into atoms.

The strife, thus begun upon the right wing of the royal army, soon communicated itself to the centre; where, on a small mound sat Philip Augustus, viewing with a calm observing eye the progress of the battle, though gradually the dust and steam of the fight, and the confused groups of the combatants, falling every moment into greater disorder, would have confounded a less keen and experienced glance than his.

Though the left was now also engaged, the monarch's eye principally rested upon the right wing of his forces, where the Count of St. Paul, the Dukes of Burgundy and Champagne, were still struggling hard with the Flemings, whose second and third line, having come up, had turned the fortune of the day, and were driving back the French towards the river.

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* Lacurne de St. Palaye was decidedly wrong in attributing the use of the lance solely to knights. Besides the example before given, the present instance of the serjeants of Soissons puts the matter beyond doubt. The words of Guillaume Guiart are—

> "Serjanz d'armes cent et cinquante.
> Criant Monjoie! ensemble brochent;
> Vers les rens des Flamens descochent
> Les pointes des lances enclines." &c.

That the serjeants-of-arms of Soissons were simple burghers is evident from the contempt with which the Flemish knights received them.—Guil. le Breton, in Vit. Phil. Aug.

"By the Lord of Heaven! Burgundy is down!" cried Philip. "Ho, Michael, gallop to Sir Guy de Coucy; tell him to charge with the men of Tankerville, to support the good Duke of Burgundy! Away!"

The serjeant to whom he spoke galloped off like lightning to the spot where De Coucy was placed as a reserve.

"By Heaven! the Duke is down, and his banner too!" continued the King, turning to Guerin, who now had joined him. "De Coucy moves not yet. St. Denis to boot! they will turn our flank. Is the knight a coward or mad?—Away, Guerin! Bid him charge for his honour."

But the King saw not what De Coucy saw, that a fresh corps of the confederates was debouching from the road behind the imperial army. If he attacked the Flemings before this body had advanced, he not only left his own rear unguarded, but the flank of the whole army totally exposed. He paused, therefore, notwithstanding the critical situation of the Duke of Burgundy, till such time as this fresh body had, in the hurry and confusion of their arrival, advanced between him and the Flemings.

Then, however, the fifteen hundred lances he commanded were levelled in an instant: the trumpets sounded, the chargers sprang forward, and, hurled like an avalanche against the flank of this newly arrived corps, the squadron of De Coucy drove them in pell-mell upon the Flemings, forced the Flemings themselves back upon the troops of the Emperor, and left a clear space for the soldiers of Burgundy and Champagne, to rally round their chiefs.

"Brave De Coucy!" cried the King, who had marked the manœuvre. "Good knight! Stout lance! All goes down before him. Burgundy is up. His banner waves again. Ride, Walter the Young, and compliment the Duke for me. Who are these coming down? I cannot see for the dust."

"They are the burgesses of Compiègne and Abbeville, and the oriflamme, sire," replied Guillaume des Barres. "They want a taste of the fight, and are forcing themselves in between us and those Saxon serfs, who are advancing straight towards us."

As he spoke, the men of the communes, eager to signalize themselves in the service of a king who had done so much for them, marched boldly into the very front of the battle, and mingled hand to hand with an immense body of German infantry which was approaching rapidly towards the King.

The French communes, however, were inferior to the burly Saxons, both in number and in strength; and were, after an obstinate fight, driven back to the very foot of the mound on which Philip was placed. The knights and men-at-arms who surrounded him, seeing the battle so near the monarch's person, charged through the ranks of the burghers, and, mingling with the Saxon infantry, cut them down in all directions with their long heavy swords. The German cavalry again spurred forward to support their own communes; and the fight became general around the immediate person of the monarch, who remained on the summit of the hillock, with no one but the Count de Montigny, bearing his standard, and Sir Stephen of Longchamp, who had refrained from following the rest into the mêlée.

"For God's sake! sire, retire a little!" said the knight: "if you are hurt, all is lost."

"Not a step, for a thousand empires!" replied the King, drawing down his visor and unsheathing his sword, as he beheld three or four German knights spurring towards him at full career, followed by a large troop of footmen, contending with the burghers of Compiègne. "We must do our devoir as a knight as well as a king, Sir Stephen."

"Mine, then, as a knight!" cried Stephen of Longchamp, laying his lance in rest; and on he galloped at the foremost of the German knights, whom he hurled dead from his horse, pierced from side to side with the iron of the spear.

The German that followed, however, without spending a blow on the French knight's casque, plunged his sword in his horse's chest, at a spot where the iron barding was wanting. Rider and horse went down at once; and the German, springing to the ground, drew a long knife from his side, and knelt upon his prostrate adversary's chest.

"Denis Mountjoy!" cried the King, galloping on to the aid of his faithful follower—"Denis Mountjoy! *au secours!*" But before he could arrive, the German knight had plunged his knife through the bars of the fallen man's helmet, and Stephen Longchamp was no more. The monarch avenged him, however, if he could not save; and, as the Saxon's head was bent down, accomplishing his bloody purpose, he struck him so fierce a blow on the back of his neck, with the full sway of a vigorous and practised arm, that the hood of his mail shirt yielded at once to the blow, and the edge of the weapon drove on through the backbone.

At that moment, however, the King found himself surrounded on every side by the German foot, who hemmed him in with their short pikes. The only knight who was near him was the Count de Montigny, bearing the royal banner; and nothing was to be seen around but, either the fierce faces of the Saxon pikemen looking out from under their steel caps, drawing their circle closer and closer round him, and fixing their eager eyes upon the crown which he wore on the crest of his helmet, or else the forms of some German knights at a short distance, whirling about like armed phantoms, through the clouds of dust that enveloped the whole scene.

Still Philip fought with desperate valour, plunging his horse into the ranks of the pikemen, and dealing sweeping blows around with his sword, which four or five times succeeded in clearing the space immediately before him.

Well and nobly too did the Count de Montigny do his devoir, holding with one hand the royal banner, which he raised and depressed continually, to give notice to all eyes of the monarch's danger, and striking with the other on every side round Philip's person, which he thus protected for many minutes from the near approach of his enemies.

It was in vain, however, that the King and his banner-bearer displayed such feats of chivalrous valour. Closer and closer the German burghers hemmed them in. Many of the Saxon knights became attracted by the sight of the royal banner, and were urging their horses through the mêlée towards the spot where the conflict was raging so fiercely, when one of the serfs crept close to the King's charger. Philip felt his horse reeling underneath him; and, in a moment, the animal fell to the ground, bearing its rider down along with it.

A hundred of the long, three-edged knives, with which many of the Saxons fought that day, were instantly at the King's throat, and at the bars of his helmet. One thought of Agnes—one brief prayer to Heaven, was all that seemed allowed to Philip Augustus; but that moment, the shout of "Auvergne! Auvergne!" rang upon his ear and yielded hope.

With his head bent down to his saddle-bow, receiving a thousand blows as he came, his horse all in foam and blood, his armour hacked, dented and broken, Thibalt d'Auvergne clove the hostile press with the fierce rapidity of a falcon in its stoop. He checked his horse but by the royal banner; he sprang to the ground; dashed, weltering to the earth, the boors who were kneeling on the prostrate body of the King, and, striding over it, whirled his immense mace round his head, at every blow sending the soul of some Saxon on the cold pilgrimage of death. The burgesses reeled back; but at the same time the knights who had been advancing, hurled themselves upon the Count d'Auvergne, and heaped blow on blow on his head.

The safety of the whole host—the life and death, or captivity of the King—the destiny of all Europe—perhaps of all the world, depended at that moment on the arm of a madman. But that arm bore it all nobly up; and, though his armour was actually hewn from his flesh, and he himself bleeding from an hundred wounds, he wavered not a step; but, still striding over the body of the King, as Philip lay unable to rise, from the weight of his horse resting on his thigh, he maintained his ground till, knight after knight arriving on both sides, the combat became more equal.

Still the fight around the royal banner was doubtful, when the battle-cry of De Coucy was heard approaching. "A Coucy! A Coucy! St. Michael! St. Michael!" rang over the plain; and the long lances of Tankerville, which had twice completely traversed and retraversed the enemy's line,* were seen sweeping on, in unbroken masses, like a thunder-cloud advancing over the heaven. The regular order they had still preserved, as well as their admirable training, and confidence in their leader, gave them vast superiority. The German pikemen were trampled under their tread. The knights were forced back at the point of the spear; the communes of Compiègne and Abbeville rallied behind them, and, in a short time, the field around the royal banner was once more clear of all enemies.

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* This circumstance, however extraordinary, is not the less true; and though attributed by the various chroniclers to various persons, is mentioned particularly by all who have described the battle of Bovines.

The first thing was to free the King from the weight of his horse, which had been stabbed in the neck, and was now quite dead. The monarch rose; but, before he remounted, though there were a thousand horses held ready for him, and a thousand voices pressing him to mount, he exclaimed, "Where is the Count d'Auvergne? I owe him life.—Stand back, Guillaume des Barres! your foot is on his chest. That is he in the black armour!"

It was indeed the unhappy Count d'Auvergne, who had borne up under a multitude of wounds, till the life of the King was in safety. He had then fallen in the mêlée, striking still, and now lay upon a heap of dead that his hand had made. By the King's order, his casque was instantly unlaced; and Philip himself, kneeling beside him, raised his head upon his knee, and gazed in the ashy face to see if the flame of life's frail lamp was extinct indeed in the breast of him who had saved him from the tomb.

D'Auvergne opened his eyes, and looked faintly in the face of the monarch. His lips moved, but no sound issued from them.

"If thou diest, Auvergne," said Philip, in the fulness of his gratitude, "I have lost my best subject."

The Count made another effort to speak. The King stooped over him and inclined his ear. "Tell her," said the broken accents of the dying man,—"tell her—that for her love—I died—to save your life."

"I will," said Philip Augustus—"on my faith, I will! and I know her not, or she will weep your fall."

There was something like a faint smile played round the dying knight's lip; his eyes fixed upon the King, and the spirit that lighted them passed away for ever!

"Farewell, Auvergne!" said the King. "Des Barres, see his body removed and honoured. And now, good knights," cried he, springing on horseback, "how fares the fight? My eyes have been absent too long. But, by my faith! you have worked well while I was down. The enemy's left is flying, or my sight deceives me."

"'Tis true, my lord;—'tis true!" replied Guillaume des Barres; "and Ferrand of Flanders himself is taken by the Duke of Burgundy."

"Thank God for that! cried Philip, and he turned his eyes quickly to the centre. "They seem in strange confusion there. Where is the imperial standard? Where is Otho himself?"

"Otho has to do with Peter of Malvoisin and Gerard the Sow," replied William des Barres, laughing, "and finds them unpleasant neighbours doubtless. But do you know, sire, that a pike head is sticking in your hauberk?"

"Mind not that!" cried the King; "let us charge! Otho's ranks are broken; his men dispersed; one gallant charge, and the day is ours. Down with your lances, De Coucy! Men of Soissons, follow the King! Knights, remember your own renown! Burghers, fight for your firesides! Denis Mountjoy! Upon them! Charge!"

It was the critical moment. Otho might have rallied; and his forces were still more than double those of the King; while the Count de Boulogne and the English, though the Earl of Salisbury had been dashed from his horse by the mace of the bellicose Bishop of Beauvais, were still maintaining the fight to the left. The well-timed and well-executed charge of the King, however, accompanied, as he was, by the choice chivalry of his realm, who had gathered about him to his rescue, decided the fate of the day. The Germans fled in confusion. Otho himself narrowly escaped being taken; and though a part of the right wing of the confederates retreated in somewhat better array, yet the defeat even there was complete, and the Earl of Salisbury and the Count de Boulogne were both made prisoners.

For nearly six hours the combat lasted; and, when at last the flight was complete, the number of prisoners was so great, that Philip dared not allow his troops to pursue the fugitives for any length of way, lest he should be mastered at last by those whom he had just conquered.

At five o'clock the trumpets sounded to the standard to recall the pursuers; and thus ended the famous battle of Bovines—a strife and a victory scarcely paralleled in history.

CHAPTER XLIII.

The hurry and confusion of the battle was over; order was greatly restored; and the victorious army had encamped on the banks of the river, when Philip Augustus retired to his own tent; and, after having been disarmed by his attendants, commanded that they should leave him alone for an hour. No one was permitted to approach; and the monarch sat down to meditate over the vast and mighty deed he had accomplished.

Oh, what a whirlpool of contending feelings must have been within his bosom at that moment! Policy, triumph, ambition, hate, revenge, and love, each claimed their place in his heart.

The recollection of the difficulties he had overcome; the fresh memory of the agitating day in which he had overcome them; the glorious prospects yet to come—the past, the present, and the future, raised their voices together, and, with a sound like thunder, called to him, "Rejoice!"

But Philip Augustus sat with his hands clasped over his eyes, in deep and even melancholy thought. A feeling of his mortality mingled, he knew not why or how, even with the exultation of his victory. To his mind's eye, a shadow, as if from the tomb, was cast over the banner of his triumph. A feeling of man's transitory littleness,—a yearning after some more substantial glory, chastened the pride of the conqueror; and, bending the knee before Heaven's throne, he prayed fervently to the Giver of all victory.

After long, deep thought, he recalled his attendants; received several messengers who had come on from Lille; and, ordering the hangings of his tent to be drawn up, he commanded the various chieftains who had distinguished themselves in that day's conflict to be called around him.

It was a beautiful summer evening; and the rays of the declining sun shone over the field of battle into the tent of the victor, as he sat surrounded by all the pomp of royalty, receiving the greatest and noblest of his land. For each he had some gratulatory word, some mention of their deeds, some praise of their exertions; and there was a tempered moderation in his smile, a calm, grave dignity of aspect, that relieved his greater barons from the fears which even they, who had aided to win it, could not help feeling, respecting the height to which such a victory might carry his ambition. There was not a touch of pride in his deportment—no, not even of the humility with which pride is sometimes fond to deck itself. It was evident that he knew he had won a great battle, and rejoiced—that he had vanquished his enemies—that he had conquered a confederated world;—but yet he never felt himself more mortal, or less fancied himself kindred to a god. He had triumphed in anticipation—the arrogance of victory had exhausted itself in expectation; and he found it not so great a thing to have overcome an universe as he had expected.

"Thanks, brave Burgundy! thanks!" cried he, grasping the hand of the Duke, as he approached him. "We have won a great triumph; and Burgundy has fully done his part. By my faith, Lord Bishop of Beauvais! thy mace is as good a weapon as thy crosier. I trust thou mayest often find texts in Scripture to justify thy so smiting the King's enemies."

"I spill no blood, sire," replied the warlike Bishop: "to knock on the head is not to spill blood, let it be remarked."

"We have, at all events, with thine aid, my Lord of Beauvais," said the King, smiling at the prelate's nice distinction,—"we have, at all events, knocked on the head a great and foul confederation against our peace and liberties.—Ha! my young lord of Champagne! Valiantly hast thou won thy knighthood! Guillaume des Barres, thou art a better knight than any of the round table; and to mend thy cellarage, I give thee five hundred acres in my valley of Soissons. And Pierre de Dreux, too, art thou, for once in thy life, satisfied with hard blows? De Coucy, my noble De Coucy! to whom I did some wrong before the battle. As thou hast said thyself, De Coucy, God send me ever such traitors as thou art! However, I have news for thee will make thee amends for one hard word. Welcome, St. Valery!—as welcome as when you came to my succour this fair morning. Now, lords, we will see the prisoners—not to triumph over them, but that they may know their fate."

According to the King's commands, the several prisoners of high rank, who had been taken that morning, were now brought before him; a part of the ceremony to which even his own barons looked with some doubt and anxiety, as well as the captives themselves; for, amongst those who had fought on the other side, were many who were not only traitors to the King, inasmuch as violating their oath of homage rendered them so—but traitors under circumstances of high aggravation, after repeated pardon and many a personal favour; yet who were also linked, by the nearest ties of kindred, to those in whose presence they now stood as prisoners. The first who appeared was the Earl of Salisbury, who, in the fear caused by the number of prisoners, had been bound with strong cords, and was still in that condition when brought before the King.

"I am sorry to see you here, William of Salisbury," said Philip, frankly. "But why those cords upon your hands? Who has dared, so unworthily, to bind a noble knight? Off with them, quick! Will you not yield yourself a true prisoner?"

"With all my heart, sir King," replied the Earl, "since I may no better. The knaves tied me, I fancy, lest the prisoners should eat up their conquerors. But, by my faith! had the cowardly scum who have run from the field, but fought like even your gownsmen, we should have won few prisoners, but some glory."

"For form's sake, we must have some one to be hostage for your faith," said the King, "and then, good knight, you shall have as much liberty as a prisoner may.—Who will be William of Salisbury's surety?"

"That will I," said De Coucy, stepping forward. "In life and lands, though I have but little of the last."

"Thank thee, old friend," said the Earl, grasping his hand. "We fought in different parts of the field, or we would have tried some of our old blows; but 'tis well as it is, though 'twas a bishop, they tell me, knocked me on the head. I saw him not, in faith, or I would have split his mitre for his pains."

Prisoner after prisoner was now brought before the King, to most of whom he spoke in a tone to allay their fears. On Ferrand of Flanders, however, he bent his brows, strongly moved with indignation, when he remembered the presumptuous vaunting of that vain, light Prince, who had boasted that, within a month, he would ride triumphant into Paris.

"Now, rebellious vassal," said the monarch, with severe dignity of aspect, "what fate does thy treason deserve? Snake, thou hast stung us for fostering thee in our bosom, and the pleasures of Paris, shown to thee in the hospitality of our court, have made thee covet the heritage of thy lord. As thou hast boasted, so shall it befall thee; and thou shalt ride in triumph into our capital; but, by Heaven's queen! it shall not be to sport with jugglers and courtezans!"

Ferrand turned deadly pale, in his already excited fears, misconstruing the King's words. "I hope, my lord," said he, "that you will think well before you strike at my life. Remember, I am but your vassal for these lands of Flanders, in right of my wife—that I am the son of an independent monarch, and my life may not——"

"Thy life!" cried Philip, his lip curling with scorn,—"Fear not for thy pitiful life! Get thee gone! I butcher not my prisoners; but, by the Lord! I will take good care that thou rebellest not again! Now, Renault of Boulogne," he continued, turning to the gigantic Count of Boulogne, who, of all the confederates, had fought the longest and most desperately, entertaining no hope of life if taken, both from being one of the chief instigators of the confederacy, and from many an old score of rebellion not yet wiped off between himself and the King. He appeared before the monarch, however, with a frank smile upon his jovial countenance, as if prepared to endure with good humour the worst that could befall; and seeing that, as a kind of trophy, one of the pages bore in his enormous casque, on the crest of which he had worn two broad blades of whalebone, near six feet high, he turned laughing to those around, while the King spoke to Ferrand of Flanders—"Good faith," said he, "I thought myself a leviathan, but they have managed to catch me notwithstanding."

"Now, Renault of Boulogne," said the King, sternly—"how often have I pardoned thee—canst thou tell?"

"Faith, my lord!" replied the Count, "I never was good at reckoning; but this I do know, that you have granted me my life oftener than I either deserved or expected, though I cannot calculate justly how often."

"When you do calculate, then," said Philip, "add another time to the list; but, remember, by the bones of all the saints, it is the last!"

"Faith! my lord, you shall not break their bones for me," replied the Count. "For I have made a resolution to be your good vassal for the future; and, as my old friend, Count Julian of the Mount says, my resolutions are as immoveable as the centre."

"Ha, Count Julian!" said the King. "You are welcome, fair Count; and, by Heaven, we have a mind to deal hardly with you. You have been a comer and goer, sir, in all these errands. You have been one of the chief stirrers-up of my vassals against me; and, by the Lord! if block and axe were ever well won, you have worked for them. However, here stands Sir Guy de Coucy, true knight, and the King's friend; give him the hand of your daughter, his lady-love, and you save your head upon your shoulders."

"My lord, it cannot be," replied old Sir Julian, stoutly. "I have already given the knight his answer. What I have said, is said—my resolutions are as immoveable as the centre, and I'd sooner encounter the axe than break them."

"Then, by Heaven! the axe shall be your doom!" cried Philip, giving way to one of his quick bursts of passion, at the bold and obstinate tone in which his rebellious vassal dared to address him. "Away with him to the block! and know, old mover of rebellions, that your lands and lordships, and your daughter's hand, I, as your sovereign lord, will give to this brave knight, after you have suffered the punishment of your treason and your obstinacy."

Sir Julian's cheek turned somewhat pale, and his eye twinkled; but he merely bit his lip; and, firm in his impenetrable obstinacy, offered no word to turn aside the monarch's wrath. De Coucy, however, stepped forward, and prayed the King, as Sir Julian had been taken by his own men, to give him over to him, when he doubted not he would be able to bring him to reason.

"Take him, then, De Coucy," said Philip; "I give you power to make what terms with him you like; but before he quits this presence, he consents to his daughter's marriage with you, or he quits it for the block. Let us hear how you will convert him."

"What I have said, is said!" muttered Sir Julian,—"my resolutions are as immoveable as the centre!"

"Sir Julian," said De Coucy, standing forward before the circle, while the prisoner made up his face to a look of sturdy obstinacy, that would have done honour to an old, well-seasoned mule, "you told me once, that I might claim your daughter's hand, if ever—Guillaume de la Roche Guyon, to whom you had promised her, being dead—you should be fairly my prisoner, and I could measure acre for acre with your land. Now, I have to tell you, that William de la Roche fell on yonder plain, pierced from the back to the front by one of the lances of Tankerville, as he was flying from the field. You are, by the King's bounty and my good fortune, my true and lawful prisoner; and surely the power of saving your life, and giving you freedom, may be reckoned against wealth and land."

"No, no!" said Sir Julian. "What I have said——"

But he was interrupted by the King, who had recovered from the first heat into which Sir Julian's obstinacy had cast him, and was now rather amused than otherwise with the scene before him. "Hold, Count Julian!" cried he, "do not make any objection yet. The only difficulty is about the lands, it seems—that we will soon remove."

"Oh, that alters the case," cried Count Julian, not sorry in his heart to be relieved from the painful necessity of maintaining his resolution at the risk of his life. "If you, sire, in your bounty, choose to make him my equal in wealth—William de la Roche Guyon being dead, and I being his prisoner,—all the conditions will be fulfilled, and he shall have my daughter. What I have said is as firm as fate."

"Well, then," replied the King, glancing his eye towards the barons, who stood round, smiling at the old knight's mania, "we will not only make De Coucy your equal in wealth, Sir Julian, but far your superior. A court of peers, lords!—a court of peers! Let my peers stand around."

Such of the spectators as were by right peers of France, advanced a step from the other persons of the circle, and the King proceeded.

"Count Julian of the Mount!" said he, in a stern voice, "We, Philip the Second, King of France, with the aid and counsel of our peers, do pronounce you guilty of *leze majesté*; and do declare all your feofs, lands, and lordships, wealth, furniture, and jewels, forfeited and confiscate to the crown of France, to use and dispose thereof, as shall be deemed expedient!"

"A judgment! a judgment!" cried the peers, while the countenance of poor Count Julian fell a thousand degrees. "Now, sir," continued the King, "without a foot of land in

Europe, and without a besant to bless yourself,—William de la Roche Guyon being dead, and you that good knight's prisoner,—we call upon you to fulfil your word to him, and consent to his marriage with your daughter, Isadore, on pain of being held false and mansworn, as well as stubborn and mulish."

"What I have said is said," replied Count Julian, putting forth his wonted proposition in a very crest-fallen tone. "My resolutions are always as firm as the centre.—De Coucy, I promised her to you, under such circumstances. They are fulfilled, and she is yours—though it is hard that I must marry my daughter to a beggar."

"Beggar, sir!" cried the King, his brow darkening again; "let me tell you, that though rich enough in worth and valour alone to match the daughter of a prince, Sir Guy de Coucy, as he stands there, possesses double in lands and lordships what you have ever possessed. De Coucy, it is true: the lands and lordships of Tankerville, and all those fair domains upon the banks of the broad Rhone, possessed by the Count of Tankerville, who wedded your father's sister, are now yours, by a charter in our royal treasury, made under his hand, some ten years ago, and warranted by our consent. We have ourself, pressed by the necessities of the state, taken for the last year the revenue of those lands, purposing to make restitution—to you, if it should appear that the Count was really dead—to him, if he returned from Palestine, whither he was said to have gone. But we find ourself justified by an unexpected event. We acted in this by the counsel of the wise and excellent hermit of Vincennes, now a saint in God's paradise: and we have just learned, that the Count de Tankerville himself it was who died ten days ago in the person of that same Bernard, the anchorite of Vincennes. He had lived there in that holy disguise for many years; and it was so long since we had seen him, the change in his person, by fasts and macerations, was so great, and his appearance as a hermit altogether so different from what it was as the splendid Count of Tankerville, that, though not liable to forget the faces we have seen, in his case we were totally deceived. On his deathbed he wrote to us this letter, full of pious instruction and good counsel. At the same time, he makes us the unnecessary prayer of loving and protecting you. You, therefore, wed the proud old man's daughter, far his superior in every gift of fortune; and, as some punishment to his vanity and stubbornness, we endow you and your heirs with all those feofs that he has justly forfeited, leaving you to make what provision for his age you yourself may think fit."

Count Julian hung his head; but here let it be said, that he had never any cause to regret that the King had cast his fortunes into such a hand; for De Coucy was one of those whose hearts, nobly formed, expand rather than contract under the sunshine of fortune.

CHAPTER XLIV.

Six days had elapsed after the scenes we have described in our last two chapters, and Philip Augustus had taken all measures to secure the fruits of his victory, when, at the head of a gay party of knights and attendants, no longer burdened with warlike armour, but garmented in the light and easy robes of peace, the conquering monarch spurred along the banks of the Oise, anxious to make Agnes a sharer of his joy, and to tell her that, though the crafty policy of Rome still prolonged the question of his divorce, he was now armed with power to dictate what terms he pleased, and to bring her enemies to her feet.

The six months had now more than expired, during which he had consented not to see her; and that period of absence had given to his love all the magic light with which memory invests past happiness. The brightest delight, too, of hope was added to his feelings,—the hope of seeing joy reblossom on the cheek of her he loved, and the inspiration of the noblest purpose that can wing human endeavour carried him on,—the purpose of raising, and comforting, and bestowing happiness.

It may easily be believed, then, that the monarch was in one of his gayest and most gladsome moods; and to De Coucy, who rode by his side, full of as high hopes and glad anticipations as himself, he ever and anon poured forth some of the bright feelings that were swelling in his bosom.

The young knight, too, hurrying on towards the castle of Rolleboise, where Isadore, now his own, won by knightly deeds and honourable effort, still remained, uncertain of her fate—

gave way once more to the natural liveliness of his disposition; and living in an age when Ceremony had not drawn her rigid barrier between the monarch and his vassal, suffered the high spirits, which for months had been, as it were, chained down by circumstance, to shine out in many a quick sally and cheerful reply.

The death of his companion in arms, the unhappy Count d'Auvergne, would indeed throw an occasional shade over De Coucy's mind. But the regrets which we in the present age experience for the loss of a friend in such a manner—and which De Coucy was formed to feel as keenly as any one—in that age met with many alleviations. He had died knightly in his harness, defending his monarch; he had fallen upon a whole pile of enemies his hand had slain; he had wrought high deeds, and won immortal renown. In the eyes of De Coucy, such a death was to be envied; and thus, though, when he thought of never beholding his friend again, he felt a touch of natural grief for his own sake; yet, as he remembered the manner of his fate, he felt proud that his friend had so finished his career.

It was a bright July morning, and would have been extremely hot, had not an occasional cloud skimmed over the sky, and cast a cool though fleeting shadow upon the earth. One of these had just passed, and had let fall a few large drops of rain upon them in its course, the glossy stains of which on his black charger's neck Philip was examining with the sweet idleness of happiness, when De Coucy called his attention to a pigeon flying overhead.

"A carrier pigeon, as I live! my lord!" said the knight. "I have seen them often in Palestine. Look! there is its roll of paper!"

"Has any one a falcon?" cried the King, apparently more agitated than De Coucy expected to see, on so simple an event. "I would give a thousand besants for a falcon!"

One of the King's pages in the train, carried, as was common in those days, even during long journeys, a falcon on his wrist; and hearing the monarch's exclamation, he, in a moment, unhooded his bird, and slipped its gesses. Lifting its keen eyes towards the skies, the hawk spread its wings at once, and towered after the pigeon.

"Well flown, good youth!" cried the King. "What is thy name?"

"My name is Hubert," replied the boy, somewhat abashed, "My name is Hubert, beau sire."

"Hubert? What, nothing else? Henceforth, then, be Hubert de Fauconpret;" and having sportively given this name to the youth—a name which descended distinguished to after years, he turned his eyes towards the falcon, and watched its progress though the sky. "The bird will miss his stroke, I fear me," said the King, turning towards De Coucy; and then, seeing some surprise at his anxiety painted on the young knight's countenance, he added, "That pigeon is from Rolleboise. I brought the breed from Ascalon. Agnes would not have loosed it without some weighty cause."

As he spoke, the falcon towered above the pigeon, struck it, and at a whistle brought it, trembling and half dead with fear, to the page, who instantly delivered it from the clutches of its winged enemy, and gave it into the hands of the King. Philip took the scrap of paper from the poor bird's neck, caressedit for a moment, and then again threw it up into the air. At first, it seemed as if it would have fallen, from the fear which it had undergone, though the well-trained falcon had not injured it in the least. After a few faint whirls, however, it gained strength again, rose in a perpendicular line into the sky, took two or three circles in the air, and then darted off at once directly towards Paris.

In the meanwhile, Philip Augustus gazed upon the paper he had thus received; and, whatever were the contents, they took the colour from his cheek. Without a word, he struck his horse violently with his spurs, urged him into a gallop, and followed by his train as best they might, drew not in his rein till he stood before the barbican of the castle of Rolleboise.

Pale cheeks and anxious eyes encountered his glance, as he dashed over the drawbridge the moment it was lowered. "The Queen?" cried he—"the Queen? How fares the Queen?" But, without waiting for a reply, he sprang to the ground in the court, rushed past the crowd of attendants, through the hall, up the staircase, and paused not till he reached the door of that chamber which he and Agnes had inhabited during the first months of their union, and in which, from its happy memories, he knew she would be fond to dwell. There, however, he stopped; the beating of his heart seeming almost to menace him with destruction if he took a step farther.

There was a murmur of voices within; and, after an instant's pause, he opened the door, and gliding past the tapestry, stood at the end of the room.

The chamber was dim, for the night was near; but at the farther extremity was the faint light of a taper contending with the pale remains of day. He could see, however, that his marriage-bed was arrayed like the couch of the dying; that there were priests standing round in silence, and women in tears; while one lovely girl, whose face he knew not, knelt by the bedside, and supported on her arm the pale and ashy countenance of another, over which the grey shadow of death seemed advancing fast.

Philip started forward. Could that be Agnes—that pale, blighted thing, over whose dim and glassy eyes a strange, unlifelike film was drawn, the precursor of the shroud? Could that be Agnes—the bright—the beautiful—the beloved?

A faint exclamation, which broke from the attendants as they beheld him, reached even the heavy ear of the dying. The film was drawn back from her eyes for a moment; life blazed up once more, and concentrated all its parting light in the full, glad, ecstatic gaze which she fixed upon the countenance of him she loved. A smile of welcome and farewell hung upon her lip; and, with a last effort, she stretched forth her arms towards him. With bitter tears, Philip clasped her to his bosom. Agnes bent down her head upon his neck . . . . and died!

Oh, glory! oh, victory! oh, power! Ye shining emptinesses! Ye bubbles on the stream of time!

THE END.

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